

Peter Sjølyst-Jackson

Troubling Legacies

Migration, Modernism and Fascism
in the Case of Knut Hamsun

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Peter Sjølyst-Jackson



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Abbreviations

The bibliography at the end of this book includes a chronology of Hamsun's oeuvre with a comprehensive overview of English translations. Many of the extracts quoted in the body of *Troubling Legacies* (e.g. Hamsun's articles and lectures) are translated by myself, and appear in English for the first time.

Hamsun's 'canonical' works are often available in multiple translations, and the abbreviations below indicate the editions I have used. Where possible, for the benefit of the English-speaking reader, an original edition is 'paired' with a corresponding English translation. Thus, in the endnotes 'S, 316/253' refers to the 1890 Copenhagen edition of *Sult*, page 316, paired with Egerton's translation, *Hunger*, page 253. Separate abbreviations are used for additional translations (e.g. HB & HL). Endnotes also indicate where I have modified the translation ('tr. mod.'), or replaced the 'paired' translation with my own ('my tr.'). All other quotations from Danish and Norwegian texts (primary or secondary) are translated by myself.

Works by Knut Hamsun

The new edition of Hamsun's *Collected Works* was, alas, not complete at the time of writing; therefore, the old collected works and other collections hitherto published separately are used where necessary.

Abbreviations for Collected Editions

- NHS 1–27 *Samlede Verker. Ny Utgave.* 27 vols. Ed. Lars Frode Larsen. Oslo: Gyldendal, 2007–2009.
- SV 1–15 *Samlede Verker.* 15 vols. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1954; tenth impression, 2000.

Other Abbreviations

- DSG *Den siste glede.* NHS vol. 7/*The Last Joy.* Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2003.

- FDUS *Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv: Artikler om Litteratur* (From the Unconscious Life of the Mind: Articles on Literature). Oslo: Gyldendal, 1994.
- FMA *Fra det moderne Amerikas åndsliv*. NHS vol. 24/*The Cultural Life of Modern America*. Tr. and Ed. Barbara Gordon Morgridge. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969.
- GS *Growth of the Soil*. Tr. W. W. Worster. London: Souvenir Press, 1995.
- HB *Hunger*. Tr. Robert Bly. London: Picador, 1974.
- HL *Hunger*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 2001.
- HPS *Hamsuns Polemiske Skrifter* (Hamsun's Polemical Writings). Ed. Gunvald Hermundstad. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1998.
- LÆ *I Æventyrland*. SV vol. 3/*In Wonderland*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. Minnesota: Ig, 2004.
- M *Mysterier*. København: Philipsen, 1892; facs. edn. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1992/*Mysteries*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 2001.
- MG *Markens Grøde*. NHS vol. 10/*Growth of the Soil*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 2007.
- OH *Over Havet. Artikler, Reisebrev* (Across the Ocean: Articles and Travel Letters). Ed. Lars Frode Larsen. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1990.
- P *Pan*. NHS vol. 4/*Pan*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 1998.
- PGS *Paa gjengrodd Stier*. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1949/*On Overgrown Paths*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1999.
- S *Sult*. København: Philipsen, 1890; facs. edn. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1992/*Hunger*. Tr. George Egerton. New York: Knopf, 1920.
- SL 1–2 *Selected Letters Vol 1: 1879–98* and *Selected Letters Vol 2: 1898–52*. Ed. and Tr. Harald Næss and James McFarlane. Norwich, England: Norvik Press, 1990 and 1998.
- UHS *Under høststjernen*. NHS vol. 5/*The Wanderer: Under the Autumn Star and On Muted Strings*. Tr. Oliver and Gunnvor Stallybrass. London: Picador, 1977.
- V *Victoria*. NHS vol. 4/*Victoria*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 2005.

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Introduction: Legacies of Hamsun

Why deny that so many 'revolutionary', audacious, and troubling works of the twentieth century have ventured into or even committed themselves to regions that, according to a philosophy which is confident of its liberal and leftist-democratic humanism, are haunted by the diabolical?

*Jacques Derrida*¹

Knut Hamsun (1859–1952) is among European literature's most fascinating, enigmatic and troubling writers. A progenitor of literary modernism in the 1890s, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1920, and widely acclaimed as the great epic novelist of his generation in the following years, he became a Nazi sympathizer in the 1930s and 1940s, and was labelled a traitor following the Second World War. Arrested soon after the liberation of Norway in 1945, Hamsun was condemned for his public support of the German Occupation of Norway since 1940, but was subsequently admitted to the Psychiatric Clinic in Oslo, where the aged and increasingly frail author was held from October 1945 to February 1946, allegedly to assess whether he was fit to stand trial. The psychiatrists assigned to Hamsun's case, Gabriel Langfeldt and Ørnulf Ødegård, had ambitions that went beyond their legal remit. They envisaged the possibility of 'a whole new study in characterology'.² In one celebrated instance, their characterological agenda ran up against what was, in effect, a problem of *writing* and a problem of *literature*. Since Hamsun was profoundly deaf in his old age, several questions and answers had to take place in writing, and it was in response to an oddly circular request for 'a characterisation of the nature of your character' that Hamsun returned a scrap of writing containing something of a lesson in literary history. The psychiatrist, on this occasion, wished to know whether Hamsun 'had always been *aggressive*', since he also appeared very 'sensitive', and indeed '*vulnerable*'. 'And what other character traits do you carry within yourself', the psychiatrist probed: 'Suspicious? Egotistical or generous? Of a jealous nature? A distinct sense of justice? Logical? Of a sensitive or cold nature?'³ Imperviously ignoring the binary hierarchies of these 'character traits', Hamsun admitted that he probably carried all of them at the same time, and reinforced his point by re-writing them into a flat, linear sequence – his 'aggressive' nature; his 'vulnerable, suspicious, egotistic, generous, jealous, right-minded, logical, sensitive nature' – adding, dryly, 'these would all be

human traits'.⁴ No single 'character trait' should be privileged over another, he wrote in explanation, a point that had been at issue in literature since the nineteenth century:

I have not in any other way analysed myself than by creating in my books many hundreds of different figures – each separately spun from myself, with the wants and merits that fictional persons have.

The so-called 'naturalistic' period, Zola and his time, wrote about humans with principal character traits. They had no use of nuanced psychology; their humans had a 'prevailing facility' that governed their actions.

Dostoyevsky and many others taught us something else about humans.

Since I began I don't think there exists in my entire production a person with such a whole, rectilinear prevailing facility. They are all without so-called 'character', they are split and divided [*oppstykket*; 'in bits and pieces'], not good and not bad, but both, nuanced, variable in their minds and their actions.

And thus I am undoubtedly myself. [. . .]

That which forms me, furthermore, comes from the divine gift, which made it possible for me to write my books. But this I cannot 'analyse'.

Brandes has called it 'divine Madness'.⁵

The clarity and erudition of the passage stands in strange contrast to the blunt dispatch of the report's final diagnosis. Hamsun was neither 'mentally ill' nor 'insane', concluded the psychiatrists, but was 'a person of permanently impaired mental faculties'.⁶ The 'scientific' ambition to classify Nazi sympathizers as abnormal, compromised in this case by the fact that the diagnosis only furnished the legal authorities with a doubtful pretext for dropping the criminal charges and for transferring the case to a civil compensation claim, speaks of a troubled history. These uneasy agendas of the postwar era, however, encountered in Hamsun, as assuredly as they disavowed, the 'divine Madness' of writing and the uncanny survival of literary traces: the French novelist Émile Zola, the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the Danish and Jewish literary critic Georg Brandes, and the critique of character psychology which dates right back to the Swedish playwright and novelist August Strindberg, whose 'modern characters', Hamsun wrote in 1889, were not 'types' but 'agglomerations of time's faded and proximate fragments of culture, scraps of books and newspapers; bits of people'.⁷

The scene of writing at the Psychiatric Clinic in Oslo indicates, nevertheless, a troubling fissure within and between the writings, politics and public personas of Hamsun. How was it possible for an author, who founded his writing career upon the rejection of reductive 'character psychology' and simplistic 'types' in European literature, to commit himself and his writing to a political movement, Nazism, that promoted only the most violently reductive schemas of 'types' in the twentieth century, through its racism, anti-Semitism and

totalitarianism? What, in the abyss of a writer's project to inscribe in literature the nuanced, split, divided and fragmentary experience of modernity, were the affinities with Nazism?

Despite the appearance of monumental unity and totality furnished by the *Samlede Verker* (Collected Works), Hamsun's writings remain highly marked by the experience of fragmentation, displacement, disorder and, as I shall be arguing in this book, *a dislocated history of migration* inscribed into the grain of his literary texts. His most compelling books, bound together only by the signature across the intricate itineraries of his writings, entail an ongoing, autobiographical inscription, which does not concern the many references to 'facts' in his texts subsequently verified by diligent biographers, but relates instead to the shifting positions of Hamsun's books, novels, polemical articles and lectures – their audacious compositions, styles, figures and formal innovations – which can nonetheless be historicized in illuminating ways with reference to the movements, displacements and turns of Hamsun's life and career, coming as these do in many different guises, and which never belong simply to one place or location, whether he writes as a tailor's son from the backwaters of rural Norway in the mid-nineteenth century; as a migrant who had joined the great exodus to America in the 1880s; as a 'radical aristocrat' lampooning the European literary establishment of the 1890s; as a tourist travelling through Russia and the 'Orient' at the turn of the century; as a heir to the Norwegian 'poetocracy' after the deaths of Henrik Ibsen in 1906 and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson in 1910; as a conservative polemicist warning against the evils of Russian Bolshevism and American industrialism in the decades that followed; as a Nobel laureate extolling the virtues of peasant values and the homely soil around 1920; as an occasional but grimly insistent apologist for the German Nazi regime in the 1930s and 40s; or as a beleaguered old author writing again after the Second World War, bringing his long career to its final words, as the legal authorities handed down their final verdict in 1948 – 'and I end my writing'.⁸

The trajectory sketched above, with which this book is concerned, raises further questions. Although there is wide agreement, today, that Hamsun was indeed a pioneer of modernism and later a Nazi sympathizer, it is in fact much harder to discern what 'modernism' and 'Nazism' are supposed to mean here, since both neologisms – separately and particularly in combination – call up a bewildering array of possible correspondences and dizzying mirroring effects, in short, what Jacques Derrida in a related context has called a 'bustling confusion'.⁹ In Hamsun's case, first of all, there is a strong sense of *historical distance* between the works most commonly identified as modernist and his later Nazi sympathies, in so far as the early works – *Hunger* (Sult, 1890), *Mysterier* (Mysterier, 1892) and *Pan* (Pan, 1894) – came at least three decades before the fascist and Nazi movements had any purchase outside Italy and Germany. This last point relates, furthermore, to a more problematic sense of *geographical and cultural dislocation* between Hamsun and the various metropolitan centres of Europe. His writings never belonged to any of the canonized movements of

modernism, even as he was read and admired by such figures as André Breton in Paris who, in his 'Manifesto of Surrealism' from 1924, found in *Hunger* an anticipation of his own theory of automatic writing,¹⁰ or Lou Andreas-Salomé in *fin de siècle* Vienna, who found in *Pan* an escape from the city into the dark eroticism of nature.¹¹ Neither did he belong to any of the movements of artistic and literary fascism associated with modernism in the 1930s; he never formulated an aesthetic programme tied to fascist movements unlike, for example, the French writers Robert Brasillach and Pierre Drieu la Rochelle;¹² and neither did Hamsun's aesthetic programme of the 1890s entail the kind of excitement with modern technology, speed and militarism that led Filippo Marinetti and futurism to align radical formal experimentation with fascist politics. On the contrary, in the period normally associated with 'modernism' and 'fascism', Hamsun had become the celebrated author of *Growth of the Soil* (*Markens Grøde*, 1917), which was widely received in 1920s Europe as an epic reassertion of tradition and peasant values. Lauded as a timely call for a return to the labour of the soil, the novel's depiction of the corruptions of industrial modernity was closely associated, by European reviewers across the political spectrum, with the mechanized mass killings of the First World War. The idea of a more peaceful coexistence with nature would later appeal to certain strains in Nazi ideology as well, whose propaganda drew heavily upon the idea of peasant values, but in another idiom – 'blood and soil' – in which dreams of a rustic Arcadia could coexist alongside the violent agendas of racial purity (blood) and the homeland (soil). It was within this frame of reference that the Nazi ideologue, Alfred Rosenberg – during the 1930s when the Nazi regime rose to power in Germany through brutal repression, imperialist expansion and modernist glorification of technology, speed and militarism – wrote of the Norwegian author and *Growth of the Soil* as 'the great present day epic of the Nordic will in its primordial form'.¹³

Was Hamsun a Nazi? The question itself tends only to provoke the blinded compulsions of condemnation and apologia. The demand for binary answers conflates what I would suggest are at least two sets, or complexes, of questions which often converge, but which should nevertheless be carefully differentiated. On the one hand, then, there is a complex of questions relating to the political positions Hamsun took up *as a public figure and polemicist* in his many articles, essays and lectures in different contexts and at different points in history; on the other hand, there is a related but by no means identical complex of questions concerning *the movements of his literary works* across six decades, from 1889 to 1949, including some twenty-four novels and books, five plays, three short story collections and a verse collection. The 'literary' works, however, are haunted by the 'polemical' works – and vice versa, as we shall see at several points in this book. This is a tricky problematic by itself, and has often been overwhelmed by other questions lurking in the wings, but which cannot be conjured away. To what extent were his literary works complicit with the ideological agendas of Nazism? Is it ever possible to know, in fact, what the

seductions of Hamsun's texts will have been in the solitary enclosures of so many mute readers? The last question riddles the one preceding it, though it should not, I would maintain, simply abolish it. This book proposes to approach these complexes of questions in different ways, but emphasizes from the start, that the field of inquiry, as well as Hamsun's works, entails that which Derrida calls *dissemination*, which Maud Ellmann usefully sums up as 'the possibility of error, accident, fragmentation, irrecoverable waste and loss'.¹⁴

The Work of Deconstruction

Hamsun remains today as an endlessly disquieting presence in the Norwegian national canon, quite unlike the proud heritage of such figures as Ibsen, Munch and Grieg. In the words of Atle Kittang, one of Hamsun's most discerning readers, the affair 'haunts Norwegian culture' as a 'collective trauma', a 'Norwegian Hamsun-trauma'.¹⁵ Or, in the words of novelist Jan Kjørstad, to 'discuss Hamsun is to discuss the kernel of Norwegian literature. All Norwegian authors have a Hamsun-complex'.¹⁶ This book wishes to open up this somewhat proprietorial debate onto other fields of inquiry, and takes its cue from some of Derrida's most thought-provoking formulations in response to the 'affairs' of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger and the Belgian and American literary theorist Paul de Man. At stake, for Derrida, are the respective specificities of Heidegger and de Man's involvements with Nazism, the nature of their complicity at different points, and how these issues might be read, analysed and interpreted in conjunction with their theoretical and philosophical works. The controversies attendant to the cases of Heidegger and de Man in the late 1980s, however, were often characterized by a certain refusal, on the part of various critics and scholars, simply to read their works, which were often reduced to common denominators associated with 'fascism' or 'Nazism', and condemned as such. Derrida's responses were not simply a scholastic rejection of erroneous and tendentious (non)readings, however, but a rejection of the manipulative rhetoric in which the condemnations and apologies were couched, from where he proposed new and much more challenging ways of reading Nazism alongside literary and philosophical texts. Insisting that the 'condemnation of Nazism, whatever must be the consensus on this subject, is not yet a thinking of Nazism',¹⁷ one of Derrida's most stunning interventions comes through his insistence that Nazism should not be reduced to any set of comforting schemas or definitions since this, he maintains, would fail to discern and also fail to deconstruct, what remains most troubling about Nazism, namely, that it was a complex, differentiated and internally inconsistent formation which nonetheless carried through the worst kinds of violence, precisely, by the violently *reductive* logic of racism, anti-Semitism and totalitarianism. There is a rigorous coherence and consistency, therefore, in Derrida's injunction that 'one must guard against reproducing the logic one claims to condemn'.¹⁸

Derrida's questions for the Heidegger-text, moreover, has far-reaching implications for reading, and for thinking about fascism and literature in general:

Instead of erasing or trying to forget it, must one not try to account for this experience, which is to say, for our age? And without believing that all of this is already clear for us? Is not the task, the duty, and in truth the only new or interesting thing to try to recognise the analogies and the possibilities of rupture between, on the one hand, what is called Nazism – that enormous, plural, differentiated contingent whose roots are still obscure – and, on the other hand, a Heideggerian thinking that is also multiple and that, for a long time to come, will remain provocative, enigmatic, still to be read.¹⁹

Derrida, in other words, displaces the premises upon which so many debates around fascism and literature are based, including those of Hamsun scholarship. As anyone familiar with 'the endlessly recurring debate on Hamsun' in Norway would recognize, 'the analogies and the possibilities of rupture' between Hamsun and Nazism are enormous and provide much fuel for condemnation and apologia.²⁰ The Nazi movement in all its horror provokes condemnation, and rightly so, but has resulted in an often unthinking ritual, reflected in the rise of democratic humanism in Europe and America during the postwar era, to purge Western culture of a violent history which, as the Martiniquan writer Aimé Césaire points out, was never the exclusive property of the Nazis in the first place. The sheer provocation of Nazism for European liberals, argues Césaire, was the terrifying manner by which this movement brought the violence of racism and imperialism *home* to Europe.²¹

But the terrifying spectre of Nazism continues to spread panic and confusion in the field of criticism, and tends often to generate a self-perpetuating 'debate', which is more accurately described as a set of recurring accusations and counteraccusations, condemnations and apologies, attempts to expel or rehabilitate, which share in common only the naïve wish that the whole problem might disappear. Derrida, however, opens up the troubling possibilities of what both condemnation and apologia actively ward off, namely, that the confluence of 'literature' and 'politics' happens as *a process in deconstruction*: the bewildering array of splits and schisms within and across different texts, histories and forces – separating, converging and displacing one another. Political responsibility, in Derrida, always comes back to the risky adventure of reading, to the incalculable future of the texts in question, and the responsibility *to the future* with regard to their troubling remains. The title of this book, *Troubling Legacies*, then, concerns the questioning of such remains, of recalling fragile and uncanny remnants of a corpus, along with the disturbing excesses these can generate. This book does not, therefore, propose to assess any single 'legacy', as though it were an autonomous, essentially stable, literary object. I wish to reflect upon Hamsun's multiple, contradictory, even mutually exclusive legacies; to convey the singularity of the literary texts while remaining sensitive to questions of

historical context, textual analysis and translation which, in turn, may underpin a more effective way of addressing the troubling remains of this – can I bring myself to say it? – *great* writer.

Scope and Itinerary

The gaps and omissions of *Troubling Legacies* are, of course, the inevitable result of choices and exclusions within and between a tremendous mass of texts that, as far as this book is concerned, must also contend with the fact that Hamsun remains something of an oddity – or foreign particle – in the world of Anglo-American criticism. My ambition, here, is not to *redress* this situation (by recourse to another monumental chronology, for example), but rather, to *address* questions of literature and contextuality in general through Hamsun – and hopefully in a way that might open his works onto other fields of literature, politics and theory. It entails, therefore, an engagement with that which Derrida, in *Spectres of Marx*, calls ‘the radical and necessary *heterogeneity* of an inheritance’. Since a legacy or inheritance ‘is never gathered together’ and ‘never one with itself’, one must always choose from several possibilities:

Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the injunction to *reaffirm by choosing*. ‘One must’ means *one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibilities that inhabit the same injunction. [. . .] If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. [. . .] One always inherits from a secret – which says: ‘read me, will you ever be able to do so?’²²

Legacies are riddled with silences, secrets and aporias; they trouble and out-flank the necessary choices of critical endeavour, spur it on, and make countless demands.

The critical orientation of this book combines deconstruction and psycho-analysis, especially the works of Derrida and Freud, with a historically informed reading of Hamsun. I begin, in the sub-section towards the end of this introduction, with *From the Cultural Life of Modern America* (*Fra det moderne Amerikas Aandsliv*, 1899), the fierce polemic that won Hamsun his initial notoriety in Scandinavia, but which speaks of a transitory experience of migration and a violent clash with the bustling modernity of America, which stood in such sharp contrast to the author’s background. The dislocations of migration are everywhere manifest in *Hunger*, which I discuss in Chapter 1, through a close reading of its figures of writing, materiality and dislocation. Chapters 2 and 3 then pursue the galloping Hamsun-text into *Mysteries* and *Pan*, coming in the wake of his polemic foray into ‘Aristocratic Radicalism’ and the works of Strindberg, Brandes, Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky; out of this I develop a reading

of sex, class and laughter, drawing on psychoanalysis and deconstruction. Chapter 4 picks up the trail of Hamsun's literary migration at a later point – on his journey through the Caucasus region of imperial Russia in 1899, re-plotted as the semi-fictional travelogue *In Wonderland (I Æventyrland, 1903)* – in order to think through problems of nation building, identity, language and ethnocentric geopolitics in Hamsun's authorship. His complicity with the Nazi movement is thereafter addressed more systematically in Chapters 5 and 6, initially through a reading of *Growth of the Soil* and its histories of reception, a set of texts that attend to some of the most terrifying events yet most benign pastoral removes of the twentieth century, and thereafter through a historical interpretation of Hamsun's disturbing polemical articles from the 1930s and 1940s, along with some reflections on his later novels, as these were read within two very different currents of the Nazi movement, as represented by Alfred Rosenberg and Martin Heidegger. The book concludes, finally, with a reading of the semi-autobiographical *On Overgrown Paths (Paa gjengrodde Stier, 1949)*, which Hamsun wrote as a response to his treatment at the hands of the Norwegian authorities after the Second World War, and whose treacherous provocations on the scene of accusations and counteraccusations in postwar Norway, dissolves into a moving memory, or narrative fiction, as the writer is called back through his expiring perceptions to the site of migration, in rural America of the late-nineteenth century, cast adrift – and longing for home.

Adolf Hitler, maintained Hamsun on the eve of the Norwegian liberation in 1945, had been 'a prophet of the gospel of justice for all nations'.²³ Hamsun's stance is indefensible, but consistent in a way posterity often renders incomprehensible, in part, because fascist nationalism was rejected as 'treason' in the postwar era, and thus abjected at a historical moment when *nationalism* as such was being recuperated and reinforced. The basic refusal to think through the implications of Hamsun's nationalist stance thereby speaks of another refusal, characteristic of European social democracies, to fully acknowledge the incompatibility between the idea of democratic inclusiveness and the assumptions of nationalism, which always presuppose borders and exclusions, while turning a blind eye to the violence such borders and exclusions often entail. The upshot, for our present purposes, is simply that Hamsun's nationalism cannot be understood within a framework that takes national codes for granted, precisely because his nationalist politics are rooted in the dislocating transgressions of migration: 'During my rather long life', said Hamsun during the legal hearings of his case in 1947, 'in all the countries where I have travelled, and among the ethnic groups I have mingled with, I have ever and always preserved and upheld *the homeland* in my mind'.²⁴ Hamsun's rhetoric of national rootedness, I argue, is inextricably bound up with the schisms of migration and displacement that characterized his background. As Derrida notes in *Spectres of Marx*: 'All national rootedness is rooted first of all in the memory or the anxiety of a displaced – or displaceable – population'.²⁵

The possibility of historically 'located' reading, now, is already complicated by what might be called *the heterogeneous migration of the oeuvre*. The Hamsun-text proves particularly difficult to historicize, partially because the author himself never 'belonged' to any single place, but also because aspects of his works, often in translation, have been read in such divergent ways in different times and places, as might be indicated by simply listing the incongruous mix of twentieth-century notabilities who admired his work, or aspects thereof – including literary modernists of such diverse kinds as Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, Katherine Mansfield and Rebecca West, or such different Marxist writers as Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht and Maxim Gorky, or different theorists and philosophers, such as Roman Jakobson and Martin Heidegger, or again different Nazi ideologues, such as Alfred Rosenberg and Joseph Goebbels, or yet again authors such as Henry Miller, Ernest Hemmingway and Paul Auster. This indicates, above all else, the sheer variety and startling differences within and between the many cultural, literary and political currents with which aspects of Hamsun's works have found, and continue to find, their polyphonic resonances. The heterogeneous migration of the oeuvre entails, therefore, two separate yet often converging sets of movement: the internal movements of the oeuvre as an agglomeration of turns, transformations and repetitions and, thereupon, the scattering of that oeuvre in multiple fragments, through re-editions, revised editions, translations and re-translations.

Politics of Reading

The agendas of the postwar era have tended to foreclose the heterogeneous migration of the oeuvre by suspending Hamsun, so to speak, between two monolithic entities called 'Nazism' and the 'Western canon'. It is notable and also deeply symptomatic that two of the most influential contributions to international Hamsun scholarship – those of James McFarlane and Leo Löwenthal, the former a British literary historian who sought to re-inscribe Hamsun's early works into the Western canon, and the latter a German Frankfurt School critic who maintained that Hamsun's entire oeuvre was a one-way street to fascism – never acknowledged each other, even as their accounts both appeared in the English language in 1956 and 1957 respectively. The sheer contrast between the two sets the scene, in many ways, for the conflicting agendas that have riddled Hamsun scholarship ever since. For McFarlane, *Hunger* was 'merely the release in a new form of a body of thought that had been building up for the better part of a century; it was the expression in the literary mode of that same thing to which Freud was soon to give scientific formulation: speculation about the ways of the unconscious mind'.²⁶ For Löwenthal, by contrast, *Hunger* only 'states the themes that are almost endlessly repeated in the later novels', namely, 'abandonment of any participation in public life, submission to the stream of incomprehensible and incalculable forces, distrust of the intellect,

flight from the city and escape into nature'.²⁷ One finds here two mutually exclusive ways of situating the oeuvre as whole. Whereas McFarlane reads Hamsun within a genealogy of modern literature, preceded by Dostoyevsky, Strindberg and Nietzsche and succeeded by Proust, Joyce, Gide and Woolf, Löwenthal reads Hamsun as a manifestation of a socio-historical shift in 'bourgeois consciousness', from rational 'liberalism' to irrational 'late-liberalism'. This involves, says Löwenthal, a 'yearning for surrender to nature' which 'glorifies the awareness of the individual weakness' and 'at the same time exalts reverence for superior power in general'.²⁸ Where McFarlane wishes to reinstate Hamsun's 'contribution to the development of the "stream of consciousness" technique'²⁹ as the missing link in the fabled transformation of the novel-form from classical realism to radical modernism, Löwenthal associates this with a proto-fascist 'submission to the stream of incomprehensible and incalculable forces'.³⁰

McFarlane, however, does sound a note of caution: 'the final paradox that attaches itself to the early novels of the 1890s', he says, is that 'in proclaiming revolution, they inaugurate a long and extended personal counter-revolution'.³¹ This shift is often referred to as the 'epic' turn of Hamsun's later novels, which include *Children of the Age* (1913), *Segelfoss Town* (1915), *Growth of the Soil* (1917), *The Last Chapter* (1923), the *Wayfarers* trilogy (1927–1933) and *The Ring is Closed* (1936). The so-called 'epic' works – the protracted and ponderous narratives of Norwegian civilization, of marginal peasant communities in the grip of the transformations of modernity, figured through powerful merchants and land-owners, struggling peasants and dispossessed but enterprising drifters – are commonly thought to involve a retreat from radical modernism into resigned conservatism, if not reactionary romanticism. In McFarlane's words, these novels involve 'a thick overlay of external incident' and 'record some of the futilities, the synthetic inadequacies of modern life':

Growth of the Soil is, however, the one real attempt to provide a positive exemplar, the producible case, to make the ideal explicit. The result was the most read, most translated, most praised and least characteristic novel Hamsun ever wrote, and which by its almost chance fame in being linked with the award of the Nobel Prize has done more to misrepresent Hamsun (in England and America at least) than anything else.³²

McFarlane, then, dismisses *Growth of the Soil* and its critical reception as 'misrepresenting' what is supposedly 'most characteristic' of the authorship as a whole. Löwenthal, conversely, pursues the opposite premise: Hamsun's novels mirror only 'the political resignation and the ideological seduction of broad social strata in contemporary Europe'.³³ Focusing on the reception history in Germany, where Hamsun's books had been translated since the early 1890s, Löwenthal maintains that the reviews 'reflect the development of

political consciousness all the way from liberalism to the slogans of the authoritarian state':

The observations on Hamsun that appeared in *Neue Zeit*, the leading theoretical journal of German Social Democracy, reveal as early as the nineties a clear political stance: Hamsun's novels are to be rejected; they do not portray living human beings but rather vague attitudes that have nothing to do with tendencies directed towards positive change.

The volumes of *Neue Zeit* from the early years of World War I and the immediate postwar years, however, contain glowing descriptions of the same writer who twenty years before had been so unambiguously rejected. What was previously judged as 'empty atmosphere' and 'mere nervous stimulus' was now perceived as 'gripping depictions of life and soul in which the most vivid reality with all its lights and shadows is transposed into the allegory of innermost life.'³⁴

Both Löwenthal and McFarlane offer fascinating glimpses into the fractured geopolitics of Hamsun's historical and cultural legacies, and yet, are too busy shoring up their own reductive attempts to encapsulate the oeuvre as a whole to discern what the above juxtaposition of their arguments makes only too apparent, namely, that the cultural and historical legacies of Hamsun's works are ideologically contested and geographically disconnected in ways that relate as much to their different contexts of reading as they do to the texts themselves. An abyss opens up, here, beneath every word Hamsun ever wrote.

McFarlane and Löwenthal represent, I would suggest, two different ways of taking flight from the possibility of this abyss, two separate politics of reading that also prescribe the dominant drifts of Hamsun scholarship: on the one hand, a number of Marxist ideology critiques primarily from the 1970s and, on the other, a more recent tendency to situate Hamsun as a modernist in the European tradition. In his discussion of 'whether there is any internal link between Hamsun's literary works and his political practice', the Norwegian literary historian, Edvard Beyer, argues that one shouldn't be 'overwhelmed' by the parallelisms 'seen and felt in Hamsun's novels', as this would ignore the 'differences and deviations', 'ambivalences and double-meanings' of his texts.³⁵ Against the inventory of clichés with which Marxist critics have sought to pin 'fascism' to Hamsun's literary works – condensed in Löwenthal as 'the pagan awe of unlimited and unintelligible forces of nature, the mystique of blood and race, hatred of the working class and of clerks, the blind submission to authority, the abrogation of individual responsibility, anti-intellectualism, and spiteful mistrust of urban middle class life in general'³⁶ – Beyer offers what is, in effect, a reversal of those clichés: Hamsun's works, he says, 'are so full of poetry, tenderness and love of life, of humour and warmth, irony and mischievous subtlety that they are entirely unidentifiable with the brutal repression and totalitarian dehumanisation that characterises Nazism'.³⁷ A related strategy consists

in calling attention to various clichés and figures that are entirely *absent* from Hamsun's works, as Nina Witoszek observes regarding the mistaken assumption that readers would encounter any 'obligatory tropes of fascism' in his novels:

We find no Nordic emblems, no eternal flame, no Viking-ships, wolves, ravens or Osenberg-dragons, no chivalry deep inside the forests. Neither do we see any references to blue-eyed, virtuous and indestructible Attilas who are ready to annihilate any person, culture or religion that is no longer vital or active. If Hamsun perhaps fell for the myth itself, he never fell for fascistic politically correct semiotics.³⁸

Such interventions, however instructive, do not move beyond the hasty strategy of reducing Hamsun's works to a series of tropes, clichés or figures while tending to foreclose the possibility of a mode of inquiry that might recognize Hamsun's 'ambivalences and double-meanings' as deeply challenging for any reading, interpretation or translation. Atle Kittang's influential study of 1984 remains, in this regard, the most theoretically astute. For Kittang, 'the critique of Hamsun's universe as an ideological universe, criticises a myth' constructed only from 'bits and pieces of Hamsun's texts'. The Marxist critique, he says, is 'mythical because it is "joined up" in a way that Hamsun's books are not', since these texts involved a 'restless reflection around the cleavages and fissures of existence'.³⁹ Kittang also counters the assumption (evident in McFarlane) that Hamsun's authorship involves a gradual 'decline' from his radical novels of the 1890s into conservative and utopian illusions. Attempting to demonstrate how the strands of 'disillusion' and 'irony' operate throughout the oeuvre, Kittang maintains that Hamsun's texts often 'deconstruct' and 'empty out' the political 'myths' attributed to them:

If literature – and therefore also Hamsun's literature – has political 'power', this would proceed not from what is preached therein, but from its capacity to distance itself from what it preaches, deconstructing its own fixed opinions, and in this way, offering readers what might be called a lesson in literature's singular form of thought. In this sense, Knut Hamsun's literature would offer the best protection against all ideological temptations – not least those Hamsun himself fell for.⁴⁰

The valuable insight, that Hamsun's literary texts can 'deconstruct' the reductive force of Nazism, resolves itself, however, into a reductive opposition between 'literature' and 'Nazism', in which the former supposedly offers 'protection' from the latter, which ignores the troubling possibility that this, quite simply, *does not always work*. Indeed, as so many aspects of the history of reception would demonstrate, and as the scene of writing in the Psychiatric Hospital in Oslo also indicates, Hamsun was quite able to recall the literary critique of character 'types' when such reductions were imposed upon himself, but had already

failed, rather more spectacularly, to put the same insight to work in the field of politics.

Hamsun and 'Europe'

The general silence around Hamsun in the world of Anglo-American criticism can easily be attributed to the author's Nazi sympathies. Such, however, has not been the fate of so many others who, in different ways, were implicated with or committed themselves to fascism or Nazism, such as Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis and William Butler Yeats. The controversies around the Hamsun affair remain quite foreign here – why?

As one peels back the layers of Hamsun's marginal history of reception in Britain and America, one encounters, first of all, a gap in translations and re-editions of his works in the postwar era, running more or less unbroken up to the late 1960s, when a small number of new translations began to appear. Peeling back the layers still further, to the interwar period, one discovers a curiously 'inverted' history of reception, explicable by the fact that – in contrast to Scandinavia, Continental Europe and Russia – Hamsun's works were more or less unrecognized in Britain and America until he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1920. In the period that followed, no less than seventeen works were translated, published and widely reviewed in the English-speaking world. For these readers, it was *Growth of the Soil* that came first, while the earlier works came later. This was not 'wholly lamentable', wrote Katharine Mansfield in *The Athenaeum* in 1920, since the neglected writer could now present 'a feast before us'.⁴¹ What followed in the British and American history of reception, however, was no literary feast, but something more akin to a bad case of indigestion, as British and American reviewers in the period from 1920 to the Second World War tended to view Hamsun's early works unfavourably in the light of *Growth of the Soil*.⁴² Such, in fact, was also the view of W. W. Worster, the first translator of the novel, writing in *Fortnightly Review* in December 1920:

[*Growth of the Soil*] is epic in its magnitude, in its calm, steady progress and unhurrying rhythm, in its vast and intimate humanity. The author looks upon his characters with a great, all-tolerant sympathy, aloof yet kindly, as a god. A more objective work of fiction it would be hard to find – certainly in what used to be called 'the neurasthenic North.'

And this from the pen of the man who wrote *Sult*, *Mysterier*, and *Pan*.

Hamsun's early work was subjective in the extreme; so much so, indeed, as almost to lie outside the limits of æsthetic composition.⁴³

The 1890s works were thus brushed aside as an immoderate, indeed freakish, manifestation of the excesses of 'the neurasthenic North', a perception with some currency, it would seem, since Rebecca West, in her review of the same

book in *The New Statesman* spent some time dismissing Strindberg as 'a certifiable lunatic of weak character' before praising Hamsun as 'one of the Promethians who have stolen fire from heaven'. West, of course, could not have known that Hamsun held Strindberg in extremely high esteem. The irony of this, however, only emphasizes how starkly contradictory Hamsun's international legacies can be: Strindberg's work, insists West, 'was too greatly deformed by insanity to be considered art, and his head was too hotly packed with delusions ever to admit a sober conception of reality', while Hamsun, to the contrary, has 'the Godlike qualities that belong to the very great, the completest omniscience about human nature and a superhuman freedom from fatigue in the labour of setting down his knowledge'.⁴⁴ Though this review, no doubt, was only resorting to the common clichés of the age, it is uncanny to read it today, as it resonates uncontrollably with the slogans and rallying cries of Nazism.

As the traces of Hamsun's name in world of Anglo-American criticism fade in the period before 1920, one is finally struck by the diminishing market impact of the English translations, especially in Britain.⁴⁵ The general indifference of the British was, to wit, a notorious bone of contention for Hamsun. Amid the hubbub of different nationalities and ethnicities encountered on his journey through imperial Russia in 1899, a young English tourist, 'complacent, mute, indifferent to everybody', becomes a special object of hatred: 'But there sat the Englishman', with an obliterating indifference that '*gjorde mig til luft*', 'turned me into air'.⁴⁶ Though Hamsun's Anglophobia would later prove useful for Nazi propaganda, that is to say, at the point when it coincided with the German war against Britain and America, it is not insignificant that this Anglophobic moment at the turn of the century took place on the eastern margin of Europe. As Franco Moretti shows in his *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800–1900*, anti-British and anti-European sentiment was not uncommon in the world of Russian literature. Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (a precious reference for Hamsun) has an acquaintance of Raskolnikov announce – as a matter of established fact – that the English political economy 'has actually declared compassion a social evil'.⁴⁷

Instructive too is Moretti's analysis of the circulation of translations in nineteenth-century Europe: although most European countries imported large numbers of British and French novels, the predictable pattern is that France and particularly Britain (the 'island race') imported much less from the continent.⁴⁸ Ibsen, then, would be the exception that proves the rule; Hamsun, like so many others, fell by the wayside. Moretti's discussion of the dominance of British and French 'narrative exports' in nineteenth-century Europe, moreover, throws up a curious fact about 'narrative imports': Denmark consistently imported more novels from France and Britain and was, therefore, one of the three main 'zones of symbolic influence' in Europe.⁴⁹ Not Germany, not Spain, not Holland, but – Denmark! If Hamsun's early works, in their time, ever belonged to any zone of symbolic influence, this was indeed it. Copenhagen, fondly and sometimes ironically referred to by Scandinavians as 'the Nordic Athens',⁵⁰ was the cultural centre in which Ibsen's works too were originally

published, in a language that was called 'Norwegian' but which owed its orthography and grammar to written Danish; the site through which all the major literary and intellectual currents passed. It is the remnants of a historically specific 'canon' that float to the surface at the Psychiatric Clinic in Oslo some 60 years later. Hamsun's familiarity with French literature, but also with literatures from Russia, or again from Germany (Nietzsche, Goethe) is scarcely comprehensible without the Danish connection, around which so many figures cluster, not least in the works of the Danish critic Georg Brandes; his *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature* (originally published between 1872 and 1875), established the canon against which Hamsun defined himself. Brandes was 'the man', as the autodidact from Norway put it in 1888, 'who quite simply taught me what little I can do'.⁵¹ It was from the Danish zone of influence, moreover, that translations of Hamsun's writings in turn migrated, or were disseminated, to Germany, Austria and Russia in the 1890s, with some translations reaching France, Holland and Italy in that decade, but hardly any at all reaching Britain then or in the period that followed, up to 1920,⁵² at which point the pertinence of Moretti's analysis is again apparent: 'What is wrong' in comparative literature, he says, 'is the implicit belief that literature proceeds from one canonical form to the next, in a sort of unbroken thread'.⁵³

Neither Hamsun nor Strindberg, indeed, were anywhere in sight when Virginia Woolf, in her 1924 essay 'Character in Fiction', announced that 'on or about December 1910 human character changed',⁵⁴ though the reputation of the Norwegian author at that time did mean his name was briefly mobilized on the conservative side of the British wrangle, when Arnold Bennett – Woolf's most cherished figure of ridicule – haughtily affirmed that 'Hamsun belongs to the old brigade'.⁵⁵ Hamsun's early work has never established itself in the modernist canon of the English language, most probably, because it never got there in the first place.

Yet Hamsun's 'Europe' arose from a different geopolitical viewpoint, with a specific set of contiguous links: Norway–Denmark–Germany, with lines to the east, Sweden–Finland–Russia. Not exactly a unified space, nor indeed a grand alliance that ever materialized, but these were nonetheless points of reference that Hamsun's polemical writings, in a fragmentary fashion, invoked with a sympathy he only rarely extended to America, and hardly ever to Britain. One suspects, however, that the English-speaking world was a little closer to home than his polemic stance ever allowed. For his only other language, besides his mother tongue, was in fact English, and his literary career certainly owed a great deal to his years of migration in America.

Hamsun and 'America'

From the Cultural Life of Modern America, first published in 1889 and subsequently suppressed by the author as 'youthful sin', is a deeply ambivalent text that, like so much of Hamsun's polemical work, attempts to abolish the contradictions

and schisms it nonetheless writes. It undermines, as Kittang might say, its own 'fixed opinions' – *though not always*, as becomes so depressingly clear in the racist strand of the text. In 1850s America, writes Hamsun, 'there were signs of an intellectual elite in two of the oldest Southern states, but the war came and uprooted it before it was established'. The 'nation's blood', says Hamsun, was from now on 'democratically mixed with that of the Negro, and intelligence sank rather than rose'. Although he asserts that slavery was an act of 'inhumanity' that 'stole them away from Africa where they belong',⁵⁶ Hamsun nonetheless reproduces a barrage of nineteenth-century racist stereotypes, that is shocking and chilling:

The Negroes are and will remain Negroes, a nascent human form from the tropics, creatures with entrails in their heads, rudimentary organs on the body of white society. Instead of founding an intellectual elite, America has established a mulatto studfarm; therefore one might be justified in seeking an intellectual elite in countries where there are greater chances for its existence than America.⁵⁷

And what more is there to say? Only that Hamsun rivals the very worst manifestations of modern racism? That his language, here, is virtually indistinguishable from the basic tenets of racial theory in European thought during the nineteenth century, the very theories that were later taken up by Nazi ideologues, just as similar racist prejudices survive today in so many places and in so many forms? Or, that his text articulates only the dread of white masculinity threatened by the confused stereotype of black masculine potency? Hamsun's text, to be sure, will confirm each point.⁵⁸ Nothing can eradicate this, and neither should it be excused.

It is also indefensible, however, to proceed simply by tracking down and isolating those vile racist moments, without considering how these, in fact, supplement something else. For the racist strand takes shape only in the last third of the text, and thus serves to 'prop up', I would argue, the uneasy rhetorical scheme of the entire book: an energetic refutation of what Hamsun regarded as the Scandinavian idealization of American liberty and democracy, a polemic stance that wishes to inhabit a position of 'European' sophistication, superiority and elitism. His opposition to all things 'American', however, is so riddled with internal contradictions, shifting standpoints, vaguely undermining autobiographical inscriptions and downright sloppy research, that the rhetoric of European sophistication very rapidly begins to look strained. It doesn't convince, and yet what does convince, is the writer's sheer fascination with his subject matter – especially in the sections on American 'Journalism' and 'Writing and Writers' – which reflect obsessively on the matter of writing as such, in a way that continually exceeds the reductive framework of his polemic. The polemic, then, portends to speak in the name of a higher 'European' culture, but is already undermined by the very opening frame of the book itself. And what we

find there is nothing less than the excitable rush of sensation that goes by the names 'modernity' and 'modernism':

The first thing that strikes the travel-weary foreigner in America and makes him bewildered is of course the intense noise, the restlessness, the hectic life in the streets, the nervous, bold dispatch with which things move along everywhere. If he lands in New York in the summertime, he will moreover be a little surprised to see gentlemen without jackets, without vests, with no more than suspenders over their shirts, strolling along the streets, arm in arm with ladies dressed in silk. This immediately has a foreign air, an air of freedom; there is haste in this etiquette. And the pace does not slacken as he travels westward. Everywhere there is the same bustling hurrah in things, the same clamorous activity in all that goes on.⁵⁹

The migrant's 'bewilderment' signals the open space into which the looming rhetoric of refutation – dressed up as European superiority over and against the supposed lack of refinement in America – eventually tightens its grip. The autobiographical inscription consists in the precarious attempt to ward off and circumvent, by means of writing, his background as an autodidact and a migrant, like some dirty stain incompatible with 'European sophistication'.

Born in 1859 to peasants in Lom, Gudbrandsdal (central Norway), Hamsun's background speaks of marginality, displacement and drift. At a time when poor folk increasingly emigrated from Norway to America, Hamsun's family was internally displaced, migrating instead to the distant province of Nordland in the far North. In his youth, Hamsun moved from one place to another, working as a shop assistant, an itinerant peddler, a clerk, a tutor and an author of juvenile peasant romances, before himself emigrating to America in 1882, alongside thousands of dispossessed farmers, crofters and day labourers. Now in his twenties, Hamsun left a job as a road construction worker before emigrating, via New York and Chicago, to Elroy Wisconsin, where he took another series of casual jobs, working as a shop assistant, a farmhand, a delivery boy and a clerk, after which he was employed in 1884 as secretary and assistant to the Norwegian Unitarian Minister and author, Kristofer Janson, in Minneapolis. He was soon torn away from the intellectual milieu he encountered there when, misdiagnosed with tuberculosis, he returned to Norway in the belief that he was going to die. After convalescing in Valdres, a Norwegian village, and then a period of poverty and starvation in Kristiania, he embarked, as a fledgling writer, on his second American emigration adventure in 1886. In an early piece, 'Across the Ocean', published as a travel account in the Norwegian daily, *Dagbladet*, on 14 November 1886, Hamsun wrote of the exodus across the Atlantic on the Thingvalla Line's modern steamer, *Geiser*, destined for New York:

A din and a clamour start up. Six hundred people bustled around each other on deck, carting their baggage loads down into the hold. There were the

impoverished mountain people from Telemark, the peasants with shaggy beards from the interior of Denmark, the big, industrious Swedes – dandies and poor people, bankrupt merchants from the towns, artisans, wives and young girls. They were the emigrating Scandinavia.⁶⁰

On reaching America, he worked initially as a streetcar conductor in Chicago, and later as a journalist and public lecturer in Minneapolis, and a casual labourer on large farms in North Dakota, before returning to Scandinavia again in 1888, now shunning Kristiania and heading, instead, for the capital of Denmark, Copenhagen, and the fabled breakthrough of his literary career. This is the biographical itinerary that *From the Cultural Life of Modern America* more or less *writes out*, but which returns as autobiographical *inscription*, even in the most racist passage of the book, when the polemicist, dressed up as the European man of letters, writes as if he were seeking out ‘an intellectual elite’ in America, but had concluded there were ‘greater chances for its existence’ in Europe.

From the Cultural Life of Modern America is thus founded upon the kind of deception that speaks of self-deception; the rhetoric of the book’s most animated sections, moreover, confidently upends one premise after another. The section on American journalism opens as a critique of the populist obsession with death, crime and murder, but concludes, nonetheless, that the ‘restless and noisy’ papers of America are ‘raw and true to life’ – quite unlike the ‘demure and idyllic’ preoccupations of America’s literary scene.⁶¹ Counter-intuitively then, a new premise is established: ‘American journalism is the most distinctive and vigorous intellectual manifestation of the American people. In its boldness, its realistic intensity, it is also from a literary standpoint the most modern.’⁶² Hamsun then sets about denouncing the literary scene (while exempting, however, the work of Mark Twain, ‘a little of Poe, a little of Hawthorne’ and ‘a little of Harte’)⁶³ in lengthy appraisals of Walt Whitman’s (1819–1892) poetry and Ralph Waldo Emerson’s (1803–1882) critical essays. Asserting initially that American literature lies ‘three whole evolutionary stages behind European literature’, Hamsun’s evident fascination with their writings soon begins to undermine his rhetoric of rejection, rupturing the ‘European’ position of sophistication he so vociferously claims to inhabit.⁶⁴ Whitman’s poetry, insists Hamsun, is ‘wild’ and ‘does not belong to any civilised language’.⁶⁵ The language of evolution presupposes European superiority, and yet, Hamsun quotes poem after poem from *Blades of Grass*, marvelling at Whitman’s ‘wild carnival of words’.⁶⁶ What is figured as a poetic failure, then, begins to look more like a case of fascination and identification: Whitman is ‘the last gifted specimen of a modern who was born primitive’;⁶⁷ his poems can be ‘monumental in their unreadability’ generating ‘literary phenomena’ which are ‘without parallel’.⁶⁸ The autobiographical inscription, here, concerns the movements of writing, and the sense by which Hamsun is grappling with writing as such – not least his own writing. Thus, he describes Emerson’s *Representative Men* (1849), as

'fine and elegant in its language, composed of short pieces, without system, full of contradictions, alternately penetrating and superficial, always interesting'.⁶⁹ Ostensibly critical of Emerson's alleged lack of system, this too becomes a source of wonderment: 'And the reader is left with a lapful of things said; they have not formed a picture; they are small, fine mosaic tiles in brilliant disorder.'⁷⁰ From the kind of textual effects one could very easily associate with Hamsun's modernism, the polemic takes another turn, speaking to that other past so studiously silenced in the American polemic: Emerson, writes Hamsun, 'declares with pride that arouses one's compassion that he "smacks of the soil"'. Nor in truth do you read very much of Emerson's production before perceiving how rankly he smacks of the soil'.

All of a sudden, Hamsun's troubling future seems to be upon us, when he writes that Emerson, 'whom a large nation was obliged to have as literary arbiter and chief for forty years' acts as if he were 'a special spokesman for the Lord'. Hamsun goes on: 'Morality has softened the brain of this excellent man and impaired his critical sense.'⁷¹ To use Hamsun's critical idiom against him, however, is only to reproduce the same critical idiom.

Troubling Legacies is an attempt to move beyond this by reading what Hamsun's texts, in spite of their reductive politics, open up in literature, amid those 'agglomerations of time's faded and proximate fragments of culture'.

Chapter 1

‘. . . Kristiania, That Strange City . . .’: Location and Dislocation in *Hunger*

The hunger of which Knut Hamsun speaks is a hunger that can be fed by pride.

Maurice Blanchot¹

‘It was in those days when I wandered about hungry in Kristiania, that strange city which no one leaves before it has set its mark upon him.’² The opening line of Knut Hamsun’s *Hunger* (*Sult*, 1890), figures the city as a ‘strange’ site, ‘*denne forunderlige By som ingen forlader før han har faaet Mærker af den*’, that leaves ‘marks’, ‘impressions’, ‘traces’ – even ‘bruises’ (‘*Mærker*’).³ Set in Kristiania (now Oslo), the narrative is tied to an anonymous destitute, ravaged by starvation, who tries to write for a living. *Hunger* is rightly considered an early example of European modernism, a compelling foray into the fleeting, fragmented and dislocated experience of the modern city dweller, and a harbinger of the major tropes of subjectivity and interiority that would haunt twentieth-century literature.⁴ Walter Baumgartner poses a striking question when, in his 1997 monograph on Hamsun, he wonders how a ‘modernist’ city experience like this should unfold in the context of Kristiania, the rather modest capital of late nineteenth-century Norway. Kristiania was no metropolis; on the contrary, it was little more than a bourgeois province of around 135,000 inhabitants, situated in one of Europe’s least developed countries.⁵

This initial paradox announces, on the one hand, a diversity of tricky themes and problems in Hamsun’s works, and, on the other, the emergence of a distinctly modern figuration of the city which, I wish to show in this chapter, proceeds from the autobiographical inscription of Hamsun’s migration years, and entails a struggle through fictional invention and the materiality of writing. The ‘city’ of *Hunger*, in other words, might be read as a figure of migration, whereby Kristiania can appear strikingly analogous to, for example, the New York of Louis Ferdinand Céline’s *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932), where the exuberantly depraved narrator also starves himself and gawks with wonder at the surging crowds, before feeling compelled to move on from his bench by the presence of a suspicious policeman,⁶ or Paul Auster’s *New York Trilogy* (1985), where the hero is lost in the city and within himself, ‘giving himself up to the movement of the streets’,

'putting one foot in front of the other and allowing himself to follow the drift of his own body'.⁷ *Hunger* can also disrupt this male-orientated genealogy, as was the case in the 'She-Notes' of George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne), whose short-story collection, *Keynotes* (1893) is generally recognized as a formative moment for the 'New Women' writers in Britain. *Keynotes* carries a dedication to Hamsun, which dates back to her reading of *Sult* in 1890 while travelling in Scandinavia, after which she sought out the author and agreed to translate his book into English. Her short story 'Now Spring Has Come', included in *Keynotes* three years later, reverses the gender binary of *Hunger*: where Hamsun's hero becomes repulsive to the idealized woman by his self-inflicted starvation, Egerton's woman becomes repulsive to the idealized male, in turn, through her self-imposed hunger.⁸ Egerton's fine translation of *Sult*, which appeared in 1899, was evidently a formative impetus for her 'She-Notes' too. The hunger of *Hunger* is catching, and grabs other writers, travelling through other locations. The 'strange city' of this text, I argue, proceeds not simply from the author's times of starvation in Kristiania, but more profoundly perhaps, from the way the text of *Hunger* re-inscribes, and so displaces and condenses, the author's experience of migration – another experience of unceasing movement passing through several cities, including Kristiania, New York, Chicago and Copenhagen, and also other locations which, as we shall see, further complicate the matter of location in *Hunger*.

This chapter does not seek to close the problem of material and literary reference points but wishes, instead, to reflect upon migration alongside *Hunger* as a literary text. In Paul de Man's terms, this concerns the work of rhetoric and figural language, the possibilities of metaphor and metonymy, which he associates with 'literature itself'. 'Rhetoric', says de Man, 'radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration'.⁹ As a rhetorical figure, then, the city of Kristiania might refer to anything and everything: it can function as a metaphor for other cities and locations, or be metonymically linked, through the contiguous itineraries of migration, to another series of cities and locations. De Man's principle of 'referential aberration' is important here, because it helps us appreciate, rather than simply dismiss or stop thinking about, the sense by which literary texts, such as *Hunger*, also migrate and scatter themselves in ways that must always exceed the migrations of their writers, and also the migrations of their readers, each of whom bring different metonymical links and metaphoric associations to bear – from one thing to another. This chapter, accordingly, takes seriously the re-tracing of *Hunger* through Marxist criticism, autobiography, translation psychoanalysis and linguistics, but seeks to move towards an understanding of how this text continues to leave other 'marks' upon all these modes of reading or re-tracing, generating what de Man calls 'material events'. This entails, as we shall see towards the end of this chapter, a counterintuitive way of thinking about materiality as such, through the sensual, sonorous 'stuff' of writing: the bottomless pit of hunger.

Returning, now, to our initial problematic, the Kristiania of *Hunger* would be 'strange' because it never coincides fully with itself and remains, like any

rhetorical figure, endlessly (dis)locatable. Baumgartner, indeed, seems somewhat at a loss about how to proceed once the question of Kristiania's function has been raised, and seeks an explanation, precisely, *from another location*, evoking Hamsun's roots in the barren landscape north of the polar circle. Those who have visited his childhood home, the island of Hamarøy, during winter, and who have walked back and forth on the length of its solitary road, says Baumgartner, would 'better understand the *Hunger*-hero's alienation'.¹⁰ This, however, can very quickly be reduced to the grand opposition between city and nature that, I would maintain, is as misleading as it is pervasive. The failure to challenge the city/nature dichotomy, along with the general idea of 'alienation', appears to rest not simply upon the questionable assumption that these are the dominant organizing principles of Hamsun's works, but more profoundly, perhaps, upon a deeper problem relating to *migration as history* – that is to say, as a kind of material history of dissemination or scattering that eludes the 'located' assumptions of historicism. To clarify this, it is instructive to reflect upon some of the insights and limitations of the Marxist critique of *Hunger*, since it foregrounds the question of the city in historicist terms.

‘ . . . That Strange City . . . ’

Leo Löwenthal's famous ideology critique of Hamsun's works, first published in the Frankfurt School journal *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in 1938, set the scene for decades of Marxist denunciations of *Hunger*. He begins by commenting on the motif of 'that strange city' announced in the opening lines of the book, asserting that this merely 'evokes the fate of the average city dweller':

The theme of the city is set at once. The fate of the hero is not comprehensible in terms of any conditions specific to him (he is, in this case, luckless and starving), but only in terms of the most general fact, the city.

Löwenthal makes two crucial allegations: first, that *Hunger* posits the city as 'a general fact' rather than a social structure subject to political action and historical change and, secondly, that this involves the adoption of an anti-intellectual and finally submissive stance that seeks resolution via the 'flight from the city and escape into nature'.¹¹

Hunger, however, involves no flight into nature. When the narrator leaves Kristiania at the end of the book, he is in fact destined for other urban centres, as he boards a ship heading for Leeds and Cádiz.¹² It is Löwenthal, in other words, who posits the dichotomy of city and nature – not *Hunger*. Let us also note, here, that the 'strange city' – '*denne forunderlige By*' – of the opening lines could be just as accurately rendered by the word 'town'. In Norwegian usage, the modern sense of the word 'city' is often rendered as *storby* – 'big town'. It is used also in the English language, where 'by' functions as a suffix in certain

place names in the north of England (e.g. Grimsby, Kirkby and Rugby), while the noun designates a 'place of habitation; a village or town' (*Oxford English Dictionary* (OED)). In this way, then, the grand binary that Löwenthal sets up between city and nature, the strict division between the urban and the rural, is already upset by the word 'by' itself – 'that strange city', '*denne forunderlige By*'.

There is something else disconcerting about this strange city, however, which brings us back to the first allegation, namely, that Hamsun's Kristiania appears bereft of any sense of historical context. This is a recurring source of consternation in the Marxist critique of *Hunger*. There is, so the argument goes, an inability to grasp the *material* conditions of the city, the social production of poverty and labour. *Hunger* shows 'a city characterized by poverty', writes the Norwegian critic Tom Christophersen, a city with beggars, unemployed seamen, invalids, and families in dilapidated, cramped housing. These things are registered as facts, but not as social issues. The hero, who is himself poor and in the grip of starvation, is 'not consciously situated in relation to the society in which he lives', argues Christophersen.¹³ The clash of Marxist perspectives with *Hunger* is still instructive because there is, indeed, something singularly troubling about the *Hunger*-hero's mode of observing the city. Late in the book, he looks out of the window from his lodgings onto Vognmand Street, observing some 'poorly dressed children in the middle of a poor street':

A load of furniture rolled slowly past them; it must have been a dislodged family, forced to change residence. This struck me at once. In the cart lay bedclothes and furniture, moth-eaten beds and chests of drawers, red-painted chairs with three legs, mats, scrap iron, tin-ware.¹⁴

'I stood gazing at all this', he continues, 'I had no difficulty apprehending everything that was going on.' What kind of apprehension would this be? Unlike the *flâneur* of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd' (1840), for instance, who sits in a London Coffee-House 'scrutinizing the mob' outside, the *Hunger*-hero does not observe things from a comfortable distance; nor does he 'survey', as Poe's *flâneur* does, the ranks of social class and the countenances of people in order 'to form some analysis of the meaning conveyed'.¹⁵ Back in Kristiania, the *Hunger*-hero just 'records' the scene outside from his dilapidated lodgings: In everything he observes, the hero observes of his observations, 'not one thing, not even one little accessory detail, was lost on me. My attention was acutely keen; I carefully inhaled every little thing'.¹⁶ His observations are detailed and precise, yet, as the Danish critic Peter Kirkegaard puts it, curiously 'empty'. The text of *Hunger*, says Kirkegaard, 'possesses one's imagination in a long tortuous intoxication and one has, after reading, great difficulty in untangling oneself from the text's nightmarish logic, in order to see it from the outside again'.¹⁷ Hovering about these Marxist commentaries lies the suspicion that Hamsun, decades later, turned to Nazism because of this refusal or inability to reflect on the material conditions of the city, and that his politics were rooted

in the a-historical, a-social and anti-intellectual reaction to the city space evidenced in *Hunger*.

This reading has, however, been superseded in recent decades by a reconsideration of Hamsun's oeuvre in the context of European modernism. Ideology critique is generally rejected as too reductive and, moreover, blinded to the aesthetics of fragmentation, interiority, irony, reflexivity and spontaneity. Hamsun's books, argues Atle Kittang, are much more contradictory and inconsistent than the Marxists would have it, entailing a 'restless reflection around the cleavages and fissures of existence'.¹⁸ Here, the point of interest is no longer the Marxist anxiety about *Hunger*'s lack of historical substance or sociological comprehension, but rather, what Kittang calls 'literature's singular form of thought'.¹⁹ In Nicholas Royle's words, *Hunger* is a text that 'breaks with linearity, dislocates every historicism' and 'is concerned with the ironic undoing, interruption, impossibilization of every program'.²⁰

That which the Marxist critics denounce as *Hunger*'s historical blindness, in other words, can now be recognized as entailing something deconstructive, intimating an experience that cannot be contained by contextual, 'grounded' comprehension. The text ceaselessly registers street names, buildings, interiors, hours of the day, people, dogs, clothes, buttons, shoes, insects and so forth, and yet, as the critic Einar Eggen says, 'the old relationship of familiarity has gone' and the 'comprehension of things is no longer given'.²¹ From the first pages of the book, we are subjected to a stream of details, many of which might be inscribed under the iconography of the modern city: a 'view of a clothesline'; a 'burnt-out smithy, which some labourers were busy clearing away'; the presence of 'placards on the walls'; 'a passing tram-car'; a drinking fountain at 'the Arcades' ('*Basarene*'); the 'hour for promenading' on Karl Johan Street.²² Bereft of their historical or social significance, the overriding effect is that of discontinuity, distraction and dislocation. Trying to write, the narrator finds himself distracted by his surroundings, 'everything I saw made a fresh impression on me. Flies and tiny mosquitoes stick fast to the paper and disturb me'.²³ Moments later 'a couple of high clarinet tones trembled up to me from the bandstand, and gave my thoughts a new jolt', after which he is moved to tears by the sight of his own feet which, jerking with every heartbeat, bring about a feeling of 'recognition', as though 'I had met an old acquaintance or got back a torn-off part of myself'.²⁴ Shortly thereafter a little old man sits down next to him, emitting an absurdly extended sigh: 'Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay, ay, ay, ay, ay, indeed!'²⁵ And on it goes. The narrator is fascinated by the little old man, engages him in a strange conversation, which soon gives way to something else, as preceding events are 'quietly effaced from my memory'.²⁶

The result, to quote John Vernon, is 'a sense of time continuously billowing and literally getting nowhere'.²⁷ And, as Royle writes, it becomes 'impossible to appropriate, assimilate or digest the time of *Hunger*, but also impossible to throw up, make a clean breast of it, disengage from the time of *Hunger*'.²⁸ The catalogue of 'impressions' around the inability to write – the flies and

gnats, the piercing clarinet notes, the shoes, the man's absurdly extended sigh – narrates, and thus comprehends, the city not in terms of social substance, but rather, as a kind of continuous discontinuity.

The City as a Figure of Migration

The modernist city of *Hunger*, as Baumgartner rightly observes, is not easily explained with reference to the marginal province of Kristiania. Signifiers of modernity do not dominate this 'strange city', nor indeed the text itself, where the newspapers and adverts covering the walls of the narrator's room, the fleeting references to shopping arcades, factories, and surging crowds, remain as if preserved in some prior state, before history turned them into a familiar iconography. As the previous discussion indicates, any assumption that there exists a deeper connection between the socio-historical reference point of Kristiania and its literary representation is already ruined by a text that, in Royle's striking phrase, 'dislocates every historicism'. The text leaves us with a problem of historical locatedness which, in fact, mirrors the problem of locating or classifying *Hunger* as a novel. 'My book must not be regarded as a novel', declared Hamsun in a celebrated letter to Georg Brandes in 1890. *Hunger*, the young upstart maintained before the great Danish critic, was a 'book' rather than a nineteenth-century 'novel' full of 'marriages, country picnics or dances up at the big house'; a book about 'the delicate vibrations of a sensitive human soul, the strange and peculiar life of the mind, the mysteries of the nerves in a starving body'.²⁹ This has tended to legitimize the somewhat romanticized idea of the unique 'psychology' of the artist, an agenda also perpetuated in Hamsun's manifesto of 1890, 'From the Unconscious Life of the Mind' (*Fra det Ubevidste Sjæleliv*), which exhorts the modern artist to trace 'the incalculable chaos of impressions', 'the random wanderings of those thoughts and feelings; untrodden, trackless journeyings by brain and heart'.³⁰ Let us observe, however, that the apparent opposition between a 'historicist' reading, insisting upon the primacy of the city as an external reality, and a 'psychological' reading, emphasizing the internal machinations of the mind, *both adhere to the same basic theory of reference*. *Hunger* is not reducible to one or the other, to the internal or the external, but demands, rather, re-thinking the status of the 'city' and, moreover, the work of 'writing'. In what follows, then, I wish to reconsider, at it were, the city *within* the writing and the *writing of* that city – after which I shall consider the hero's flighty *project of writing* within that city.

The city of *Hunger*, then, seems inextricably linked to the experience of migration which, in Hamsun's case, as an autodidact from a poor background, is notably and precisely, very dislocated and fragmentary. It is the discontinuous progression or 'trackless journeying' of Hamsun's migration years that needs to be underscored here. Biographies of Hamsun's life are invariably organized around the teleology of literary ambition and inevitable 'breakthrough' which

serves, principally, to impose some degree of order and coherence. Now, while Hamsun certainly nurtured literary ambitions, my point is that his unending movements from one place to another, and from one occupation to another, tell a different kind of story – a story more about ‘literature itself’ than literary ambitions. The crucial point about this ‘story’ is that it resists biographical storytelling, and also the cohesion of time and space upon which nineteenth-century novels are founded. Even the briefest itinerary of Hamsun’s migration years proves impossible to ‘contain’ within such strictures, in part, because the turns and repetitions are just too numerous. Hamsun was already leaving behind a string of casual jobs in Norwegian villages and small towns when he migrated to America in 1882, going through New York and Chicago to Elroy Wisconsin, where he worked as a shop assistant, a farmhand, a delivery boy and a clerk, after which he became a secretarial assistant to a Norwegian Unitarian minister in Minneapolis, before returning to Norway in 1884, and re-returning once again, following periods of starvation in Kristiania, to America in 1883, now working as a streetcar conductor in Chicago, thereafter as a farm-hand in North Dakota, and then as journalist and public lecturer in Minneapolis, before coming ‘home’ once again in 1888, this time avoiding Kristiania and moving on to Copenhagen. Whenever this itinerary is drawn up, one cannot fail to notice how one location and occupation continually displaces another in a disordered, unplanned and coincidental progression of events for which there is, furthermore, no clear beginning or end, because Hamsun’s family had been displaced between farms and occupations in Norway since his birth, before Hamsun himself was displaced in turn from his family at a tender age, and also because the author, after his breakthrough in 1890, would always be on the move, precisely, *in order to write*. The old metaphor of city and nature cannot grasp the moments of Hamsun’s life and writing, even though we are dealing with fairly striking contrasts in the early migration years leading up to *Hunger*: the Norwegian villages and towns through which Hamsun passed in the 1880s (Toten, Valdres, Kristiania) were relatively integrated whereas, in sharp contrast, the American locations – centres of commerce, industry or agriculture on city and state scale – were incomparably vast in magnitude, and marked by what Hamsun, much later, would bemoan as the ‘rootless’ existence of so many entrepreneurs, itinerant workers and people displaced from home. The American modernity through which Hamsun moved involved encounters with the big cities of New York and Chicago, but also with the mechanized agricultural stretches of North Dakota, the smaller villages that were developing into urban centres, such as Elroy and Madelia (Minnesota), and still more established and rapidly developing cities such as Madison, Wisconsin and Minneapolis, Minnesota. The variety of his occupations is also worth noting, because this indicates a constant transit between particular working and middle-class positions: unskilled physical labour alongside clerical or supervisory work, gradually overtaken by the attainment of more bourgeois and intellectual, yet still temporary and insecure, occupations like writing and lecturing.

It is pretty difficult, in anyone's vocabulary, to 'locate' Hamsun, and the old charges of anti-intellectualism and aristocratic arrogance are, above all perhaps, testimony to a more general failure to think, and to write, the dislocating experiences of migration. That Hamsun himself grappled with this disjuncture while writing *Hunger* is vividly illustrated in his letters from the period. Here, one finds a striking difference between letters written before and after his 'breakthrough', before and after the publication of *From the Cultural Life of Modern America* in 1889 and *Hunger* in 1890. 'I absolutely cannot write for the masses', he wrote to the German translator Marie Hertzfeld in 1890, now adopting the affectations of a European man of letters: 'I address myself to a culturally sophisticated and select group of people.'³¹ On his return from America two years earlier, however, he sounds more like an egalitarian humanist, or communist, here in a letter to Edvard Brandes (editor of the Danish newspaper, *Politiken*): 'I wanted to write for *people* wherever they found themselves.'³² Hamsun was struggling with the basic realist demand of location, of coherent time and space, and had quite other plans for the 'location' of *Hunger*.

I do sincerely beg you some time – in the distant future – to explain these things to me. [. . .] There is so desperately little of Norwegian in the book I am working on [*Hunger*], and I am not indifferent to its fate. I hadn't wanted to write for Norwegians – there isn't a place name in the whole book – I wanted to write for people wherever they found themselves.³³

Two years later, however, the text has been systematically and meticulously tied to its geographical location, plotting precise routes through the streets and buildings of Kristiania, writing the city with obsessive attention to the coherence of time and space, and yet all the time inscribing into the grain of the text the transitory experience of migration, as soon as the hero takes to the streets, passing through different points, drifting aimlessly, stopping at a corner for no particular reason, and turning 'off into a side street without having any errand there'.³⁴ 'Up in Grænsen Street I met Hans Pauli, who nodded and hurried past me.'³⁵ Passing through the Queen's Pavilion, he moves on to Palace Hill, where he catches sight of two ladies, whom he follows to Cisler's Music Shop, where they stop and return, passing by the hero once again, turning 'the corner of University Street and up towards St. Olav's place'.³⁶ The pursuit brings about a strange encounter with the women, which is soon displaced by a separate incident in a pawnshop, after which more restless movement follows, through time, location and interior space: 'The sun stood in the south; it was about twelve. [. . .] I wandered up Palace Hill and fell into a reverie.'³⁷ The original wish to write a book *without* place names, then, turns into the most obsessively site-specific text of Hamsun's entire authorship, yet all the time moving from one location to another in contiguous time and space, turning the paths of writing and migration into an inexhaustible scrawl, inscribing or tracing new lines, and retracing old ones again, in aimless movement.

The result is strikingly paradoxical: while the text carefully reproduces the cartography of Kristiania, it does not furnish this with any historical 'substance' or 'character': the city itself becomes a figure of migration, of transit, which also means that the borders around the city which differentiate the inside from the outside, become internally divided or split – *Hunger* does not 'contain' the city within itself nor, conversely, does the city of Kristiania contain the text of *Hunger*. In consequence and effect, therefore, the narrator never fully enters 'into' the city, nor does he ever fully extract himself 'out of' it. At one extreme, anything outside Kristiania becomes radically foreign and impossible for the narrator. The recurring motif of the harbour, for instance, which marks out the boundary of Kristiania to the fjord and the sea, calls up 'dark monsters' that 'would suck me up when night came on' and 'would carry me far across the sea and through strange lands where no humans lived'.³⁸ The opening lines 'enter' the city from a position that remains outside in time and space ('It *was* in those days . . .') and the final lines 'exit' the city by looking back across time and space: 'Once out in the fjord I straightened up, wet with fever and fatigue, looked in toward the shore and said goodbye for now to the city.'³⁹ The text of *Hunger* continually 'turns around' the limits of the city in time and space, and inscribes those turns through the restless wanderings of the narrator, as when he finds himself on 'a country road the end of which I couldn't see. Here I came to a standstill and decided to turn around.'⁴⁰ When forced to bed down in a forest on the very edge of the city, everything comes to this standstill once again: 'A brooding darkness was all around me. Everything was still, everything.'⁴¹ At the opposite extreme, when the hero is confined to a prison cell in the heart of the city, there is the same traumatic stillness: 'a thick, massive darkness without end that I wasn't able to fathom.'⁴² Such, then, is the *city within* the writing, and the *writing of* that city: a series of displaceable markers along which the narrator's hazardous project of 'writing' is bound – and eventually disbanded.

Allegories of Fiction

This project of 'writing' is not limited, however, to the content of the narrator's 'actual' writings, about which *Hunger*, in any event, says very little. It concerns, rather, the narrator's hungry pursuit of fictional inventions in general, the relentless succession of anarchic episodes as the hero, in the delirium of starvation, again and again engages in flights of fancy, constructing and re-constructing absurd and ecstatic fictions, which persistently displace any 'productive' activity of writing. *Hunger* moves, as it were, between two related yet different possibilities on the scene of writing. The first, which I discuss here, concerns the blunt yet enduring binaries that would oppose 'text' to 'material', 'fiction' to 'reality' and 'lies' to 'truth'. The second, to which I turn in the next section, concerns the materiality of writing and the vertiginous possibilities of re-tracing, re-configuration, re-invention, re-inscription and re-translation.

The old coalition between literature and lying – fiction and fibbing – haunts every crevice of this book. Towards the end of Part Four and the hero's final 'exit', he tries, as it were, to re-write a very prosaic material fact, which is directly linked to his own material condition of hunger:

A cart rolls slowly by, and I see there are potatoes in that cart; but out of rage, out of stubbornness, I contrive to say, that they certainly weren't potatoes, they were cabbages, and I swore horribly, that they were cabbages. I heard very well what I said, and swore knowingly time after time upon this lie, just to have the desperate satisfaction of committing rigid perjury.⁴³

The sight of the potatoes, then, does not produce the obvious response, namely, of indulging in fantasies of eating, or of committing theft for material well-being, but rather, the 'perjury' of re-inscription: he swears potatoes are cabbages 'in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost' and commits, thereby, a 'sin' of an entirely different order.⁴⁴ He addresses the same heavenly tribunal against which he rails at various points, as when he derisively imitates the 'style' or 'tonal quality' of the Bible ('*Bibelens stiltone*') in Part One⁴⁵ or, more notoriously, when he censures God by means of biblical rhetoric in Part Three: 'I say to you, holy Baal of heaven, you do not exist, but if you did exist I would curse you until your heaven trembled with the fires of hell.'⁴⁶

The hero thus struggles against the prosaic facts of material reality (potatoes) and, also, the laws of religion (God). Yet he also observes, from a certain distance, the very struggle that engulfs him ('I heard very well what I said'). The text continually divides the reader's attention between objectivity and subjectivity, descriptive distance and first-person intimacy, outside and inside. The hero, indeed, divides himself thus in speaking to himself: 'Come! I said, nudging myself with my elbow.'⁴⁷ This is not a process of 'alienation' brought about by splitting; the word 'alienation' presupposes a secure border between inside and outside which the work of splitting, as it were, splits. The hero beckons and nudges himself along and, by implication, beckons and nudges the reader into what, in another striking scene from Part Three, turns into something of an allegory of literary fiction as such. Employing a coachman, the hero implicates the other in the pursuit of a fictional wool-trader named 'Kierulf'. When the coachman assumes Kierulf is real and claims to recall that he wears a light coat, the hero is outraged since this 'spoil the whole man for me, such as I had fancied him'.⁴⁸ But when the driver then suggests that Kierulf has red hair and uses a gnarled walking stick ('*Knortekæp*'), the hero is instantly convinced: 'This brought the man vividly before me, and I said: "Heh-heh, I suppose no one has ever yet seen that man without a knobbly stick in his hand, of this you can be quite certain, quite certain."⁴⁹ As an allegory of fictional simulation, this scene from Part Three is prefigured in the encounter with the little old man in Part One – the one with the long sigh – wherein the other also accepts as fact the hero's succession of increasingly ridiculous lies, this time concerning the

outlandish achievements of the hero's non-existent landlord, 'Happolati', among whose many innovations include a hymn book with 'electric letters that could shine in the dark!'⁵⁰ On this occasion, however, the hero becomes outraged at the other's gullibility. The accepting but increasingly baffled responses of the old man provoke the hero into a violent denunciation: "Hell's damnation, man, do you think I'm sitting here stuffing you chock-full of lies?" I shouted beside myself. [. . .] "What the hell is up with you?"⁵¹ Losing the plot, so to speak, the narrator violently banishes the other from his inventions, effectively maintaining that it is the other – and by extension, the reader – who, in going along with such stories, would be mad, dishonest and stupid. Stranger than fiction, the scene simulates – yet denounces – the intersubjective conceit, or 'suspension of disbelief', upon which literary fiction always relies. The text of *Hunger* thus figures and acts out both writing and reading as an absurd social mechanism of implication, where megalomania overtakes negotiation and vice versa, and where exclusion overtakes inclusion and vice versa. Once again, therefore, there is no way 'into', and no way 'out of', this city of writing: the conventional borderlines are split, not only in relation to geography and location as we observed earlier, but also with regard to reality and fiction: 'internal fictions', so to speak, invade 'external reality' via the absurd scenes of implication, while irrefutable 'facts' from the outside keep troubling the internal inventions, as in the doomed attempt to 're-write' potatoes as cabbages, or the attempt to denounce God in biblical style which results, the weary narrator remarks, in 'nothing but rhetoric and literature'.⁵²

The line about 'rhetoric and literature' was, in fact, *added* several years after the original edition appeared in 1890. We encounter, here, another configuration of the same problematic around writing and invention, relating to revision, translation and re-translation.

The Matter of Words

The scenes discussed above are already engaged with the materiality of language in different ways, through the biblical cadences, the electric letters in the hymn-book, the little old man's unquestioning absorption of every single letter and syllable the hero utters, and the raging megalomania which attempts to re-write everything. It is not entirely clear how many times Hamsun returned to touch up various sections of *Hunger*. According to the translator, Sverre Lyngstad, it was revised on two separate occasions, first in 1899 and next in 1907, to 'Norwegianize' the spelling and grammar and, also, retouch and in some cases substantially change whole sentences and paragraphs.⁵³ According to Ståle Dingstad, however, it is possible to detect similar changes in the 1916 edition, and also in the 1954 edition, two years after Hamsun's death.⁵⁴ The work of multiple translation overlaps this compulsion to revise, and extends it further into the twentieth century. George Egerton's translation from 1899 was

displaced by Robert Bly's re-translation from 1967, after which this was displaced once again by Sverre Lyngstad's re-translation from 1996. There is, of course, nothing unusual about literary classics inviting multiple re-translation. What is perhaps more unusual in the case of *Hunger*, is the manner by which the text itself seems to put the very principles of re-translation to work, for example, in the scene where the hero, in one of his private writing and re-writing sessions (which doesn't necessarily involve pencil and paper), folds a piece of paper into a cone and leaves it in sight of a police officer, who picks it up to inspect its contents, before throwing it away with a cough, possibly from slight embarrassment at having found nothing inside. The incident rapidly turns into a scene of compulsive re-invention, curiously doubled through translation and re-translation:

'He coughed as he threw it away – he coughed as he threw it away'. I added new words to these, gave them additional point, changed the whole sentence, and made it catching and piquant. He coughed once – Kheu heu!

I exhausted myself in weaving variations on these words, and the evening was far advanced before my mirth ceased.⁵⁵

He coughed when he threw it away! He coughed when he threw it away! I joined new phrases to these sentences, made titillating additions, revised the whole story, and brought it to the point: He coughed only once – haugh, haugh!

I exhausted all my variations on these words and it was well on into the evening before my gaiety subsided.⁵⁶

He coughed when he threw it away! He coughed when he threw it away! I added new words, with titillating supplements, changed the whole sentence and made it more pointed: He coughed once – huh huh!

I spent myself in variations on these words, and it got to be late evening before my merriment ceased.⁵⁷

To the re-constructions and re-inventions of multiple translation, then, *Hunger* supplements its own malady of endlessly re-writing events. Adding 'new words', the translations give 'additional point', 'titillating additions', 'titillating supplements'. They have 'added new words', 'joined new phrases' and, yet again, 'added new words' generating a range of variations and repetitions, each displacing the next, most noticeably, in the untranslatable comedy of '*khøhø*': 'Kheu heu!', 'haugh, haugh!', 'huh huh!' One could pursue the material deformation of *Hunger* endlessly, not least through the effects of multiple translation; Egerton: 'I was drunk with starvation; my hunger had made me tipsy'; Bly: 'I had become intoxicated with starvation, my hunger had made me drunk'; Lyngstad: 'I was drunk with starvation, my hunger had made me intoxicated.'⁵⁸ The translators' innumerable choices and unaccountable decisions locate in the original a certain force of arbitrariness which, nevertheless, affirms an effect of invention and re-invention; the bottomless pit of hunger.

In this escalating set of variations and permutations, translations unsettle every finality on the scene of writing except, as events in *Hunger* suggest, the limits of bodily endurance, as blank incomprehension sets in, and reading is reduced to staring at 'these strange shaky letters that bristled up from the paper like small hairy creeping things' (Egerton); these 'curious shaky letters which gazed up at me from the paper like small shaggy beings' (Bly); these 'strange, trembling letters which stared up at me from the paper like small unkempt figures' (Lyngstad).⁵⁹ The compelling idea, in Lyngstad and Bly, that the 'shivering letters' ('*skælvende Bokstaver*') are 'staring' or 'gazing' back at the reader is not wholly rooted in the original versions. Egerton's rendering, here, retains more surely the sense that the shivering letters 'bristled up from the paper' ('*stritted op fra Papiret*'). The only elements Hamsun himself changed in this sentence were the last words, the image of the 'shivering letters' as '*smaa haarede Dyr*' ('little hairy creatures') replaced with '*små bustede figurer*' ('little shaggy figures').⁶⁰ Do any of these changes matter? Do they matter, more precisely, with regard to the 'matter' of writing? The changes themselves affect only the figurative language of the text, its figurations or images of letters, and produce, in this sense, a set of variations over what might be called the *phenomenality* of the letter, that is to say, the space where material objects stare back, as with the buttons on the woman's dress which, at one point, seem to 'stare' at the hero 'like a row of frightened eyes'.⁶¹ The figures of writing as material, the compelling images that imbue letters with uncanny sensibility, pathos, or even the ability to stare back, are endlessly re-writable, but circle around and momentarily touch upon something that *cannot* be re-written or re-translated, namely, what de Man calls 'the materiality of the letter'.

'When you spell a word', writes de Man, 'you say a number of meaningless letters, which then come together in the word but in each of the letters the word is not present'. This 'disjunction between grammar and meaning', he continues, disrupts the 'ostensibly stable meaning of a sentence' and introduces 'a slippage by means of which that meaning disappears, evanesces, and by means of which all control of that meaning is lost'.⁶² The materiality of the letter, in this sense, concerns neither the 'material conditions' of history, nor the phenomenology of what is visible or concealed.⁶³ It concerns a certain principle of disorder and dislocation, to which *Hunger* returns again and again, for example, when the narrator stares with black incomprehension at the words on the page (before they come to life through figural language), or when the little old man sits down next to him emitting his unintelligible sigh: '*Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, san!*' ('Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay, ay, ay, ay, ay, ay, indeed!').⁶⁴ The repetitive sound instantly sweeps through the hero's mind like 'wind', dislocating time and space, relegating what was going on just moments ago, to 'a long vanished period, maybe a year or two back'.⁶⁵ The materiality of the letter, in this sense, slips away as soon as it is evoked, and forms perhaps the most striking 'material' struggle of *Hunger*. Nowhere else is this struggle more compellingly written than in the moments when the hero happens upon the non-existent

words of 'Ylajali' and 'Kuboa', each of which have left tiny marks or traces upon twentieth-century psychoanalysis and linguistics. The words appear separately in two different scenes already referred to in this chapter, involving the pursuit of two Kristiania ladies on a sunny day, and a dark night of traumatic stillness later in the book, when the hero is locked up in a prison.

Words that Matter

The first scene, from Part One, unfolds as the hero becomes preoccupied by two women, and begins to follow them. He brushes the sleeve of one of them, their eyes meet, and she blushes nervously. The sight of this reaction immediately generates obsessive questioning, about why she blushes, and whether she had some thoughts of her own, then:

Suddenly my thoughts, by a capricious whim, take a singular direction; I feel myself seized with an odd desire to make this lady afraid; to follow her, and annoy her in some way. I overtake her again, pass her by, turn suddenly around, and meet her face in order to observe her. I stand and gaze into her eyes, and hit, on the spur of the moment, on a name I had never heard before, a name with a gliding, nervous sound, Ylajali!⁶⁶

In a forgotten paper from 1922, 'A Psychopathological Study of Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*', the New York psychoanalyst, Gregory Stragnell, offers a Freudian interpretation of Ylajali. It is a fine example of 'applied psychoanalysis', involving a projection of an elaborate Oedipal back-story into the text, and a prescription of a 'cure' for the hero, here referred to as 'our patient'.⁶⁷ It can only be hoped, Stragnell admonishes from the psychoanalyst's chair, 'that our patient will soon grow up' and 'assume an adult attitude towards his obligations'.⁶⁸ Absurd as it is to prescribe a cure for a literary figure, the diagnostic analysis itself is strangely compelling. Stragnell catalogues a seemingly endless list of castration motifs throughout the text, and argues that the hero's hunger is a symptom of a 'constant search for complete dependence – complete and abject poverty' in order 'to secure the recall of an infantile pattern through impotence'.⁶⁹ Calling to mind Löwenthal's later thesis about the 'submission to authority' in Hamsun's works, Stragnell also points out that the hero always 'quails before any show of authority' in his encounters with policemen and editors. The 'unconscious' wish of the hero, therefore, is 'to be less potent – to be more dependent on the father'.⁷⁰ In correlation to this, Ylajali would be the incarnation of his mother-fixation: 'The "Ylajali" goes back to the early senseless sounds he made in the days he was learning to talk,' argues Stragnell, adding that his behaviour in general is 'crowded with unconsciously recalled infantile repetitions'.⁷¹

To extend the point, the gliding Ylajali-sound is strangely akin to the materiality of letters evoked in Jacques Lacan's notion of *lalangue*, the senseless sounds

of archaic baby talk, prior to the acquisition of language. As Dylan Evans explains, *lalangue* joins the definite article *la* with *langue* (language) in order to designate 'the chaotic substrate of polysemi out of which language is constructed' and which, via 'ambiguity and homophony' can 'give rise to a kind of *jouissance*'.⁷² The performative 'lala' effect of *Ylajali* briefly arrests the relentless shifting of the narration, before the hero compulsively resumes his pursuit of the two ladies. He catches up with them from behind, only to stop as they walk past him again, looking at them as he approaches, and being looked at as he overtakes:

I made the most idiotic grimaces behind the lady's back, and coughed frantically as I passed her by. Walking on in this manner, quite slowly, always a few steps ahead, I felt her eyes on my back, and involuntarily ducked my head with shame for having caused her annoyance.⁷³

He is, in Stragnell's words, using 'all the tricks which he found successful in attracting his mother's attention'.⁷⁴ Overcome by shame, the hero resolves to stop pestering them, although he continues to follow them until they disappear into a four-storey building. Looking up at the building, the hero now finds himself scrutinized by *Ylajali*, who looks down upon him with quizzical eyes. When the woman finally withdraws, and the hero walks off, he can't get out of his mind that her gaze is still pursuing him down the street:

... my legs began to twitch, my gait became unsteady just because I purposely tried to make it graceful. In order to appear calm and indifferent, I flung my arms about senselessly, spat on the street, and cocked my nose in the air; but nothing helped.⁷⁵

From the arresting 'materiality' of the gliding *Ylajali* sound, the scene comes to an end with a twitching body, pursued by feminine silence. The *Ylajali* encounter is in many ways reduplicated in Part Two, albeit in a much darker register, when the now homeless hero once again invents an unheard-of word, in the 'brooding darkness' of a cell.

In his search for overnight accommodation, the narrator learns that the police offer vacant cells to the homeless people of Kristiania. Making use of this, he is at first pleased with his cell since it is 'bright' and looks 'friendly'. Then, however, the gas lamp goes out: 'I sit in utter darkness, unable to see my own hand or the white walls around me – nothing.' Unable to fall asleep, he keeps 'looking into the darkness, a thick massive darkness without end that I wasn't able to fathom'. In psychoanalytic terms, the writing-ego is of course cast back to the (non)position of the foetus, floating in the womb, which makes his otherwise troubled self-constitution through writing seem trivial: 'What if I myself were to be dissolved into darkness, made one with it?'⁷⁶ Once again, the

appearance of the new word just *happens* as an inexplicable event – he happens *upon* it, and it happens *to* him:

Suddenly I click my fingers several times and laugh. I'll be damned. Hah! – I imagined I had found a new word. I sit up in bed and say: It doesn't exist in the language, I have invented it, *Kubooa*. It has letters like a word, by the sweetest God, man, you have invented a word *Kubooa* of great grammatical significance⁷⁷

Again, Hamsun revises and supplements his text – years later – curtailing the excess of dots (' *Kubooa*'), adding immediately after this, between paragraph breaks, a line all by itself:

The word stood out sharply against the darkness before me.⁷⁸

Whereas the original version pushes more at the edges of grammar and meaning, the later edition makes the unintelligible word, as it were, shine in the darkness of the text, like those glowing electric letters from the hymnbook. In this instance, therefore, the movement from the dark unintelligibility associated with the materiality of the letter is overlaid, historically, by the shining phenomenal presence of the word.

The Russian linguist Roman Jakobson's reading of this passage responds to the second sense, that of phenomenality, as he notes that the 'signifier' makes its appearance without a 'signified'. The *Hunger*-hero, indeed, tries to pin down the absent meaning of his new word, dismissing in turn 'God', 'amusement park', 'cattle show', 'padlock' and 'sunrise'. In Jakobson's view, 'Hamsun's observation is precise': a new word demands a meaning that must be 'divergent from the meanings of other words of the same language'. Yet the result, observes Jakobson alongside Hamsun's narrator, is that 'one has an option "as to what it should not signify" without knowing "what it should signify."' ⁷⁹ In the text of *Hunger*, the word *Kubooa* takes on a visual presence in phenomenal space, and is initially greeted with jubilation. Then, however, 'the new word worries me incessantly and keeps coming back; in the end it takes possession of all my thoughts and makes me stop laughing.'⁸⁰ The signifier takes possession, and the hero tries to regain possession: 'I had invented the word myself, and I was perfectly within my rights in having it mean anything whatsoever, for that matter.'⁸¹ But it is precisely in this 'anything whatsoever' – 'referential aberration' in de Man's terms – that *Kubooa* itself only acts out another inexhaustible diversion, moving away from dark intelligibility, the darkness of the cell, or the typographical marks, dots, spaces (' *Kubooa*'). The hero finds no word for this:

The same brooding darkness around me, the same unfathomable black eternity which my thoughts recoiled from and couldn't grasp. What could

I compare it to? I made the most desperate efforts to find a word black enough to signify this darkness for me, a word so horribly black that it would dirty my mouth [*sværte Min mund*] when I uttered it.⁸²

We encounter, here, what de Man calls the disjunction of grammar and rhetoric: his mouth might be ‘dirtied’ in a figural sense like some unholy swear word, but in the literal sense, it’s as though he is looking for a word that leaves a material trace of the blackness it names. The narrator’s thoughts turn to death: ‘This is what it’s like to die, I said to myself, and now you’re going to die!’ But then he sees ‘a glimpse of light’, ‘a greyish square in the wall, a whitish tone, a hint of something – it was daylight’.⁸³ A hint, in other words, of a much more reassuring set of material relations in phenomenal space – the cell, the city outside, and the possibility of contiguous movement through visible locations. The contiguity of movement and migration, here, serves to hold the dark unintelligibility of matter at bay; at the same time, however, it is the same kind of movement that rubs up against, or causes the hero and reader to glimpse, what is strange and impenetrable about matter.

Migration’s Trace

Hunger, like the ‘strange city’ it writes, never fully coincides with ‘itself’. The text is not one, and yet neither can it simply be divided into a set of distinct texts, as it keeps re-tracing and re-inventing the same ‘material’, through the supplements, displacements and effacements of textual revision, which is also to say, through the autobiographical inscription of migration. *Hunger* keeps moving, yet is ‘bound together’ by the contiguous links of migration that are inscribed into the grain of a ‘text’ written and re-written over the inexhaustible structure of metonymical displacement. The text is anything but ahistorical in this sense, because it continually inscribes a historical experience of migration and, in so doing, keeps circling around the process of inscription and re-inscription as such, right down to the materiality of the marks inscribed. Should ‘*Kuboa*’ mean ‘emigration’, the *Hunger*-hero wonders during his dark night in the cell. At his darkest moment, he is again haunted by what lies beyond the borders of the city, the harbour, the ships, the ‘black monsters’ waiting to ‘carry me away by land and sea’.⁸⁴ Though Hamsun would go on re-tracing related itineraries right to the end, he never wrote a book quite like this again.

Chapter 2

Aristocratic Radicalism: Nietzsche, Brandes and Strindberg

What? A great man? I can only see an actor of his own ideal.

*Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil (1886)*¹

Nietzsche would probably have spoken thus: The last word I spoke to people received support, the people nodded. But this was to be my last word, I went into the forests. For then I understood that I had either said something dishonest or something stupid. . . .

*Hamsun, The Last Joy (1909)*²

In a stern review of *Mysteries* (*Mysterier*, 1892) from the year of its publication, the Norwegian critic Kristofer Randers wrote that Knut Hamsun's latest novel was 'not really a study in reality, but a fantastic personification of the author's own thoughts, visions and dreams'.³ Writing from a perspective governed by the expectations of the nineteenth-century novel, Randers noted that the madness of the *Hunger*-hero was at least attributable to 'the physical condition of the person concerned'. Johan Nilsen Nagel of *Mysteries*, however, suffered no such hardships and was, therefore, 'an inexplicable abnormality' – like the author who created him:

Hamsun takes up a singular position in our literature. Oppositional to the point of fanaticism, with a morbid need for independence and an urge to contradict which often takes him into the wildest paradoxes, he stands alone and independent from the ruling tastes and fashions of literature and politics here at home. As a human he is a radical aristocrat, as an artist, temperamental and individualistic in the extreme. What he hates is authority in whichever character – received truths, bourgeois decency, schoolmasters' doctrinarism and the judgement of the masses. This is why the 'great men' are lambasted: Gladstone, this 'knight errant of right and truth, his brain rigid with acknowledged results'; Victor Hugo, 'that inflated spirit oozing purple, whose pen was a ham'; Leo Tolstoy, 'one of the most active fools of our age'; Maupassant for his 'crotch poetry' and Ibsen, 'who sits there like a sphinx before the people, making himself great and mysterious'.⁴

Randers articulates the critical establishment's bafflement with Hamsun in the 1890s, and offers a discerning portrait of the author, whose fabled lecture tour of Norway in 1891 presented a sweeping attack on the reigning literary 'great men' of the day.

In this chapter I shall maintain that Hamsun's polemical front against 'great men' in the early 1890s tends to blind critical readings to what is at stake in the writer's so-called 'aristocratic radicalism'. This entails a reconsideration of the significance of what Hamsun scholarship has long identified as the formative influences behind the author's supposed 'Nietzscheanism', and a rereading of Hamsun's 1891 lectures and *Mysteries* alongside the writings of Danish critic Georg Brandes and August Strindberg, the Swedish playwright, novelist and painter. Towards the end of this chapter, I develop a reading of Hamsun's early manifesto from 1890, '*Fra det Ubevidste Sjæleliv*', 'From the Unconscious Life of the Mind', relating this to Freud's notion of 'day's residues', in order to elaborate a different way of reading the tricky problematic of 'polemic' and 'literary fiction' as a logic of re-citation, re-iteration and re-invention. Leading up to this, however, I pursue a series of 'detours', through the question of the Nietzsche-reference, the links between Hamsun and aristocratic radicalism in 1890s Scandinavia, and a comparative analysis of Strindberg's novel *By the Open Sea* (*I hausbundet*, 1890) and Hamsun's *Mysteries*.

(Short)Circuits

Hamsun's 'critical sense', argues Randers, is blinded by what 'one of the book's characters, not without good reason, characterizes as megalomania'.⁵ Randers, let us note, is taking sides – *with a fictional character in the literary text*. The critic takes up a position already simulated in the novel's rhetoric. In his portrait of the 'radical aristocrat', moreover, Randers *equates* 'Hamsun' with 'Nagel' by seamlessly weaving the provocations of the fictional character in 'the small Norwegian coastal town' of *Mysteries*, with the provocations of Hamsun as a polemicist on the Scandinavian literary scene. The two are not identical, but are nevertheless difficult to hold apart. Hamsun, for his part, did insist in a letter to his friend and colleague Erik Skram in 1892 that *Mysteries* was not '*me* wanting to astonish *you* with *my* opinions'. Posterity, for its part, has paid less attention to the difference between the work of rhetoric *in fiction*, and the work of rhetoric *in history*.⁶ The difference is not easy to draw, but might be formulated thus: the literary text orchestrates not simply the utterances (of Nagel), but also the 'reception' of these, in so far as the rhetoric of the literary text also sets up the social response within its fiction (the inhabitants of that 'small Norwegian coastal town'); the polemicist in history (Hamsun 'himself', as it were), meanwhile, attempts the same orchestration, but cannot control the response in the same way (even as the historical responses themselves often simulate the general debacle of provincial astonishment narrated to such great effect in *Mysteries*).

It is the habitual conflation of the two that makes possible the reductive argument that the 'young radical aristocrat' is simply a precursor to 'the old Nazi sympathizer'. Thus, in Leo Löwenthal, a great deal is compounded into the noun 'he' which means, quite simply, Hamsun speaking *through* Nagel in the text of *Mysteries*: 'he cries for "gigantic demi-gods" and blunders into a political programme of violence: "The great terrorist is the greatest, the dimension, the immense lever which can raise worlds."' ⁷ John Carey adopts a similar mode of condemnation in his more recent study, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, and throws the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, into the same constellation: 'Hamsun provides an extreme example', says Carey, of Nietzsche's 'anti-democratic animus'; 'Hamsun's Nietzschean view of the mass is epitomized in a speech by Ivar Kareno, hero of the Kareno *trilogy*', who speaks of his belief in 'the born leader, the natural despot, the master . . . the great terrorist, the living essence of Human power, the Caesar'. ⁸ This blends, almost seamlessly, with the line about the 'great terrorist', which Löwenthal extracts from *Mysteries*: 'the superior chosen few, the masters of life, the great ones, Caiaphas, Pilate, and the emperor'. ⁹ Carey, then, makes the obvious link:

Hamsun eventually found his great terrorist in Hitler and he was the only major European intellectual to remain faithful to him to the end. A week after Hitler's suicide he published an admiring obituary in which he celebrates the Führer as 'a warrior of mankind, and a prophet of the gospel of justice of all nations'. 'His fate', mourns Hamsun, 'was to arise in a time of unparalleled barbarism'. ¹⁰

Hamsun, we are supposed to believe, was longing for 'the great terrorist' for about 35 years, before (again supposedly) his wishes were fulfilled. ¹¹ The operative presupposition, here, is that Hamsun *was* in fact longing for the 'great terrorist' and, concomitantly, that this was the rationale that turned him into a Nazi sympathizer in the 1930s. The evidence for this seems very scant indeed (see Chapter 6) and the reasoning, in any case, is nothing but a reductive short circuit. Several issues are conflated and treated as *the same*. 'Nietzsche', 'Hamsun', 'Hitler' as sharing the same basic 'view of the mass', one that presumably demands blinded *Übermensch* worship. Carey, indeed, proceeds, as if ignorant of the fact that Hamsun scholarship has long since abandoned the idea that the Norwegian author can be reduced to his later Nazi sympathies, and that Nietzsche studies has long since abandoned the idea that the German philosopher's works can be reduced to their (partial) appropriation by Nazi ideologues. ¹² Still, as Jacques Derrida says (of Nietzsche and Nazism), it would be 'preemptory to deny that something is going on here that belongs to the *same*' – after which he adds in brackets: '(the same what? the riddle remains)'. ¹³

The question of what is 'the same' in Hamsun and Nietzsche (haunted by the spectre of Hitler) has already riddled Hamsun scholarship for some time, in the ellipses and silences around the question of 'influence'. According to Harald

Beyer, in his 1959 survey of Nietzschean thought in Scandinavia, Hamsun's early works often suggest the influence of the German philosopher, for example, in the *Hunger*-hero's violent denunciation of God. According to Beyer, however, it is not before *Mysteries* in 1892 'that we hear Nietzsche's voice for the first time', embodied in the attitudes of Nagel, 'his air of cultural aristocracy coupled with generosity, his hatred of democracy, his veneration of vitality and "the great leaders", his immorality, his hatred of the masses'.¹⁴ In a similar vein, James McFarlane finds Nietzsche's 'opinions' in 'almost unmodified form on nearly every page of *Mysteries*'. Nagel, he says, is 'a small-time Zarathustra' who 'divides up the world into the masses on the one hand and a few outstandingly great men on the other'. McFarlane, however, troubles his own assertive assurance by way of the following negative affirmation of Hamsun: 'his is no Dostoyevskian "will to self-assertion", nor any Nietzschean "will to power"; it is simply the will to be different.'¹⁵ The reference to Dostoyevsky alongside Nietzsche (even as both are being quietly shunted away) begins to muddy the idea of 'unmodified' influence. In his own statement on the matter of early influences, written in 1929, Hamsun includes several caveats that speak of nothing but potential modifications lost in the mists of time:

I am no man of stone, I am impressionable, over-sensitive, hysterical some might think; perhaps I have learned from all the authors I have read, how do I know! But in my younger days nobody made the impression on me that Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche and Strindberg did – the first two of whom and in part also the last-named I had to read in translation.¹⁶

Hamsun frames his 'influences' thus: there is no transparent, unified or direct access to the 'sources' of his writings, because there are too many, because he is 'over-sensitive' to everything he reads (and he was a voracious reader) and, in the case of the privileged three – Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche and Strindberg – the influences came via translation (even some of Strindberg's works, which Hamsun could have read in Swedish). Whatever happened to 'Nietzsche's voice'? The answer has to be that it is always already displaced by other 'voices', forming something more like a 'wild chorus', as evoked in the title of Hamsun's later poetry collection, *The Wild Choir* (*Det vilde kor*, 1904). And yet, the 'influences' are indeed palpable, not least with regard to Dostoyevsky, whose *Notes from the Underground* (1865) and *Crime and Punishment* (1865–1866), for example, look like launching pads for both *Hunger* and *Mysteries*. The first chapter of *Crime and Punishment*, thus, sets up the basic premise upon which *Hunger* is constructed: a poverty stricken lodger awakes, worries about the beseeching looks of his landlady, the rent he can't pay, before taking to the streets enclosed in the world of his mind; the second chapter, as Raskolnikov arrives at a local inn, circumscribes the basic premise for so many farcical 'debates' in *Mysteries*, as Nagel's Russian forebear engages in a boozy conversation, rapidly disintegrating, with acquaintances

towards whom he exhibits thinly veiled contempt; the long first-person harangue that opens *Notes from the Underground*, similarly, anticipates the first-person interior monologue of Nagel, and so on.

The Nietzsche influence fades, yet comes back, since Dostoyevsky is often said to be 'proto-Nietzschean'. Like Nagel in *Mysteries*, Nietzsche is never fully present – he keeps disappearing the moment he ought to appear: 'A stranger appeared in town, a certain Nagel, a remarkable eccentric charlatan who did a lot of curious things and then disappeared as suddenly as he had come.' Nagel arrives only to depart. The steamer that brings him to the small Norwegian coastal town at the end of the fjord, immediately carries him away. Only as he recedes into the distance of the fjord does the text bring forth his full name: 'This man was Johan Nilsen Nagel.' The comedy continues as Nagel reappears the next day, this time 'overland, travelling by coach and pair'. The narration, which is tied to the village, is as stupefied as the reader: 'He could just as easily, well far more easily, have come by sea, and yet he arrived by carriage.' Nagel is seen lighting a cigar shortly after his arrival, after which he 'disappeared down the street', not to be 'seen again until long past midnight' – 'Where had he been? It became apparent later that he had gone back to the neighbouring town, walking to and fro the whole long distance he had travelled by carriage in the morning.'¹⁷ Several characters keep coming and going in *Mysteries*, appearing and disappearing around the (dis)appearing figure of Nagel. Proceeding through circular detours, the plot suspends every fixed point of reference, while nonetheless dangling it there, right under your nose.

So it is, also, with Nietzsche's disappearing presence in the Hamsun-text. Scrutinizing every available trace, Lars Frode Larsen speculates that Hamsun may have read translated excerpts of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in the Danish journal *Ny Jord* as early as March 1889.¹⁸ It is also possible he read some scattered aphorisms from *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Arne Garborg in 1891; the collection of books Hamsun left after his death, Sten Sparre Nilson says, included Swedish translations of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Antichrist*, none of which were available, however, before 1897 and 1899.¹⁹ Overriding all this, Øystein Rottem asserts that Hamsun could 'hardly have read a single text by Nietzsche' in the early 1890s.²⁰ Harald Beyer, it turns out, was right all along: Hamsun's main source was Georg Brandes' pioneering exposition on the German philosopher from 1889, 'Friedrich Nietzsche: An Essay on Aristocratic Radicalism'. The Nietzsche influence, then, was 'mediated' by the Danish critic, Georg Brandes, at which point the circuit appears complete, except that it isn't, since Beyer intimated another detour all those years ago when he alighted on a reference Hamsun made to Strindberg in 1889 as 'a radical reactionary' ('*en reaktionær Radikaler*'); this, argued Beyer, was a 'remodelling' of Brandes' description of Nietzsche as a 'radical aristocrat'.²¹ The circuits of the (dis)appearing Nietzsche-reference grow ever more complex: Strindberg discovered Nietzsche when he read press reports of Brandes' lectures on Nietzsche in 1888,

after which he sent a comically rhapsodic letter to Brandes: 'My spiritual uterus has found a tremendous fertilizer in Friedrich Nietzsche so that I feel like a dog about to litter! He is the man for me!'²² The image conjured up by Strindberg, henceforth, is that of a pan-Scandinavian chain of 'fertilization' which, in turn, 'litters' the Nordic discourses – polemic and literary – with 'conceptions' of Nietzsche.²³

These detours of influence are not insignificant, because they destabilize the reductive presuppositions that abolish reading. It should be observed, first of all, that Nietzsche was introduced to Scandinavia – indeed to Continental Europe – by a Danish critic with Jewish origins, and that this occurred some 30 years before Nietzsche was appropriated as 'Nordic' by anti-Semitic ideologues of the Third Reich. In the formulation 'Hamsun's Nietzschean view of the mass', then, it is possible to question each element, 'Hamsun', the 'Nietzschean view' and, finally, 'the mass'. Hamsun's lecture circuit in 1891 went, let us note, through Norwegian 'cities' (towns, really), and *Mysteries*, to wit, is set in a 'small Norwegian coastal town'. The figuration of the 'crowd' and the 'mob', in this context, is not quite the same as, say, fears of 'the mass' in those parts of Britain and Continental Europe that were experiencing urban sprawl, overcrowding, and industrial growth. It's another difference to bear in mind – even as the riddle of 'the same' remains.

A Lecture (De)Tour

We come back, then, to the general debacle the Norwegian critic, Kristofer Randers, was describing in 1892, when 'Hamsun' (i.e. Nagel) attacked the 'great men' of the age: Gladstone, Hugo, Tolstoy, Maupassant and Ibsen. Hamsun's rhetoric of rejection does not strike any decisive blow at the politics or writings of these figures, so much as at the public adulation surrounding them, which, to Hamsun's way of thinking, gave them an intolerable air of liberal sentimentality and empty pomposity. The lecture tour of 1891 homed in on the 'Four Greats' of Norwegian literature – Henrik Ibsen, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Alexander Kielland and Jonas Lie – along with opportunistic attacks on Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller and Hugo, and the arguments about these writers are indeed risible, certainly if one reads with the expectation of 'serious' critique. Hamsun's articles, essays and lectures on literature are violent ground-clearing exercises that, on closer reading, have quite other 'literary' implications.

The Nietzschean strain is there at the very beginning of his first lecture, 'Norwegian Literature' ('*Norsk Literatur*'). It is consistent with the idea of the *Übermensch* – 'overman' or 'superman' – which, in Michael Bell's words, 'is already a complex figure who exerts a spontaneous and personal, rather than a desired or institutionalized, authority; and he would not wish for followers'.²⁴ Hamsun is out to offend, attack and destroy – but not to found a new 'movement' or 'school':

My Gentlemen and Ladies!

It is about Norwegian literature I shall speak tonight, and what I have to say will probably offend. May I, before I start, call attention to the fact that it is not my arrogant intention to found a school here in these two or three lectures. That I can't do and neither do I want to; I didn't want to, even if I could, even if I had the energy. On the contrary, I want to attack the schools, and I endeavour to make it graspable for you [*Dem*], that I have a right to attack them [*dem*]. I'll be as *offensive, as destructive this evening, as possible* . . .²⁵

This mode of attack is slippery, however, since the formal '*Dem*' ('You', the audience) sounds the same as '*dem*' ('them', the 'schools' and 'movements'), and opens the door for the general confusions of an offended listener. Nevertheless, the starting premise is precisely in line with the *Übermensch* idea; not once, however, does Hamsun actually call – as Nagel does in *Mysteries* – for 'the superior chosen few, the masters of life' or 'the great terrorist'. For all its bravado and provocation, there is no *Übermensch* worship here. On the contrary, the silent function of the Nietzschean strain is to countersign the intemperate and overblown rejection of mere 'great men', and to silently *authorize* Hamsun's pursuit of the 'new' and the 'modern'.

This might also be a bad case of what Harold Bloom calls 'the anxiety of influence', since Hamsun takes no prisoners and observes a fastidious silence with regard to the rhetorical and polemical works that, in fact, programme his rhetoric. There is a secretive strand of para-textual borrowing in these lectures pointing straight back to the articles and essays of Brandes and Strindberg, which might be explained by Hamsun's method of writing, of jotting down random ideas on scraps of paper, sometimes copying out selected passages from his readings, and later working these scraps into his articles and fictions. The method comes to light in the embarrassing 'plagiarism' affair that engulfed him in 1892, when the German magazine *Freie Bühne* exposed that his early short story, 'Hazard' (1889) reproduced in verbatim short passages from Dostoyevsky's *The Gambler* (1867). The irreverent Hamsun scholar, Martin Nag, has traced this back to its most likely source which, as it turns out, was an *English translation* of Dostoyevsky from 1887.²⁶ Hamsun, then, was reading Dostoyevsky during his American migration years, translating the translation for his own purposes, and possibly forgetting about its provenance in the dislocated transits of migration. Was he a plagiarist? No. Like all writers, he borrowed from others, albeit a little too carelessly in the 'Dostoyevsky affair'. As we shall see, moreover, the para-textual borrowings from Brandes and Strindberg are interesting for quite other reasons.

Hamsun's 1891 lectures, first of all, repeatedly attack '*det demokratiske Nyttehensyn*', 'the utilitarian principle of democracy' which, Hamsun alleges, permeates Norwegian literature.²⁷ In this he was following Brandes, the great trendsetter, who called for a literature of democratic debate in the 1880s, and then more or less reversed his position in his 1889 essay on Nietzsche and

aristocratic radicalism.²⁸ Brandes' emphasis, here, was upon Nietzsche's critique of democracy as the perpetuation of stagnant prejudice, the critical stupors of 'Culture Philistinism':

It is not even bad culture, says Nietzsche; it is barbarism fortified to the best of its ability, but entirely lacking in the freshness and savage force of original barbarism; and he has many graphic expressions to describe Culture-Philistinism as the morass in which all weariness is stuck fast, and in the poisonous mists of which all endeavour languishes.²⁹

Democracy and public opinion, education and mentors, says Brandes after Nietzsche, are all part of the 'factory working for the benefit of Culture Philistinism'. It 'makes life a burden to exceptional men'. Distancing himself somewhat from this notion, Brandes then asserts that the 'great man' 'does not stand outside the course of history and must always depend upon predecessors'. But great thought, he agrees, 'always germinates in a single individual or in a few individuals; and these individuals are not scattered points in the low-lying mass'.³⁰

Nietzsche formulates this proposition; 'Humanity must work unceasingly for the production of solitary great men – this and nothing else is its task'. This is the same formula at which several young aristocratic contemporaries have arrived.³¹

The frame with which Brandes situates Nietzsche's importance, at this time, concerns the idea to 'train or rear a sort of caste of pre-eminent spirits who will be able to grasp the central power'.³² Towards his conclusion, Brandes directly addresses the Scandinavian literary scene which, he says, 'appears to me to have been living quite long enough on the ideas that were put forward and discussed in the last decade':

It looks as though the power of conceiving great ideas was on the wane, and even as though receptivity for them was fast vanishing; people are still busy with the same doctrines, certain theories of heredity; a little Darwinism, a little emancipation of woman, a little morality of happiness, a little free-thought, a little worship of democracy, etc.³³

Nietzsche's critique of the 'Culture Philistines', the rejection of 'a homogenous stamp of mind', thus found its resonance with Scandinavian literary culture in the late 1880s. Turning now to Hamsun's polemic, the rhetorical design of Brandes' gentle mockery of literary preoccupations in Scandinavia is – more or less directly – transferred and reiterated in the lecture 'Norwegian Literature':

What has Norwegian literature mainly concerned itself with? In short: with reforming society and creating 'types'. [. . .] Our literature has concerned itself with *a little trade and sea travel, a little free-thought, a little democratic freedom*

and types – always types – of humans. [. . .] Our authors have been more interested in society than in individuals; to serve society and citizens well is their deeply honourable and humane mission; and this has made them into practical politicians and reformers before anything else. It has made them into friends of people much more than knowers of people.³⁴

The very *leitmotiv* of Hamsun's lectures, however, hinges upon the Strindbergian polemic against 'types'. In his two-part article on the Swedish playwright, published in the Norwegian daily *Dagbladet* in 1889, Hamsun often lapses into straightforward paraphrasing of Strindberg's famous 'Preface' to *Miss Julie*. Strindberg, of course, repeatedly insists that his theatrical creations are 'modern characters, living in an age more urgently hysterical at any rate than the age that preceded it':

My souls (or characters) are agglomerations of past and present cultures, scraps of books and newspapers, fragments of humanity, torn shreds of once-fine clothing that has become rags, in just the way that a human soul is patched together.³⁵

Parrot fashion, but not without stylistic panache, Hamsun reiterates:

As modern characters live in a time of transition more urgently hysterical than that preceding it, Strindberg, therefore, portrays his persons as staggering, split, made up of the old and the new. His souls are agglomerations of time's faded and proximate fragments of culture, scraps of books and newspapers; bits of people.³⁶

For Strindberg, the conception of 'character' is 'a middle-class euphemism for an automaton', an individual who has 'moulded himself into a fixed role in life'. This, he says with emphasis, is a '*bourgeois* conception'; it holds back the possibility of a 'higher' sort of individual: 'the skilful navigator of life's river, who does not sail with a fixed sheet but rides before the wind to luff again'. In 'the *bourgeois*-dominated' theatre, Strindberg repeats furiously, such individuals are always 'fixed in a mould', 'stigmatized as "characterless"' and made out to be 'drunk, or comic, or pathetic' and, accordingly, equipped 'with some physical defect, such as a club-foot, a wooden leg or a red nose'.³⁷ Still infected, Hamsun's 1890 manifesto ('From the Unconscious Life of the Mind') reasserts that literature 'has mainly had two sorts of human: wise and mad; all of them "types"'.³⁸ And, in his polemic against novelistic character psychology in 1891, the second lecture 'Psychological Literature' ('*Psykologisk Literatur*'), Hamsun once again recycles Strindberg's scheme, right down to the point about the 'red nose', developing the point for his own purposes:

Even by his outward appearance must he exhibit his character; one only has to equip him with some distinctive mark, such as a red nose, in order to

designate him as a drunkard, or one could just let him make far too much use of a single word in the language, in order to turn him into a plausible figure.³⁹

Does this logic of contamination – of para-textual borrowing, of conscious or unconscious repetitions of Brandesian and Strindbergian motifs and rhetorical turns – imply that Hamsun could only swallow, and then regurgitate, the aesthetic ideology of aristocratic radicalism? The answer, I would argue, is twofold. On the one hand, the poetic flourish of the 1890 manifesto is constantly framed by arrogant remarks which reproduce the type of class hierarchy Brandes and Strindberg construct, the individual who stands above not simply ‘the mass’, but the philistines of the bourgeoisie.

In more and more people, whose thoughts are strained and who, moreover, are sensitive by disposition, activities in the mind often arise which are of the strangest sort. It could be an entirely inexplicable state of mind: a mute, reasonless exaltation; a breath of psychic pain; a sensation of being spoken to from the distance, from the air, from the sea; a dreadful, fine attentiveness, that brings one to suffer even from the sough of atoms; a sudden, unnatural glimpse into closed kingdoms – all phenomena which have the greatest meaning, but which crude and simple petty-trade-brains [*Høkerhjerne*] can’t grasp.⁴⁰

In this instance, Hamsun’s literary project is held within the framework of class distinction whereby refined moderns are set up against the petty bourgeoisie, here characterized as narrow-minded businessmen: ‘*Høkerhjerne*’ (‘*høker*’ refers to a person dealing in petty trade, and ‘*hjerne*’ to ‘brains’).

On the other hand, however, Hamsun also winds up contradicting – or even deconstructing – his own ‘aristocratic’ stance, as can be seen most clearly in ‘Psychological Literature’. In one of his examples, designed to shatter the simplicities of character psychology, he relates a story about his time living ‘with some poor people at St. Hanshaugen’ (in Kristiania). This family of four ‘occupied me very much. They were highly unusual people’.⁴¹ The story itself concerns the folly of an author colleague who naively perceives childlike innocence in the working classes; Hamsun, who has observed the internal power dynamics of the family during his time with them as a lodger, is keen to point out that his friend is deceived by old-fashioned literary ideals. The interesting point, here, is that Hamsun – the ‘radical aristocrat’ – presents himself before a Kristiania audience, with no further ado, as a lodger with a poor family. How ‘aristocratic’ is that? Cultural radicals of the late-nineteenth century, says Helge Rønning, often envisaged the future by reaching for metaphors of a bygone ‘aristocratic’ age, as is evidenced in Henrik Ibsen’s speech referring to women and workers as ‘the new nobility’ in 1885.⁴² This is an instructive historical observation, but it seems to me the anomaly of calling Hamsun a ‘radical aristocrat’ indicates a deeper problem.

For his high-handed arrogance is not, in fact, directed at the working class subjects of his story, who are after all considered 'highly unusual people'. The rhetoric of rejection is directed at the audience, which included Ibsen, who were all being chided as so many *Høkerhjern*. The 'radical' element Hamsun brings to Brandes' and Strindberg's Nietzscheanism, I am suggesting, is this mute, disavowed and ambivalent subversion of class distinction, whereby the hierarchical system of aristocratic radicalism – the refined 'modern' against the 'crowd' of the narrow-minded 'bourgeoisie' – winds up on the side of 'the mass'. This is not simply the logical consequence of Hamsun's unfolding rhetoric; it is in fact what he says. Thus, in 'Psychological Literature', the polemic against character psychology finally explodes the very notion of the 'crowd' or 'mass' as a single, homogenous entity while, *in the very same move*, clutching at the idea of higher refinement:

But now, modern humans are in ceaseless inner movement from the cradle to the grave. Learn from the people you meet – from people you see on a steamer, from the postman who brings you your letters, from the street boy you meet during your strolls – how much the human being is variable and split. There is not a character among a thousand humans, and if one once might encounter a single character, then this would not under any circumstances be among the most richly equipped and most mature humans. Simplicity, disconnectedness, will necessarily always arise among the least equipped of people, because their very simplicity is a sign of weakness and inferiority.⁴³

The derogatory language might easily be taken as an attack on 'the low-lying mass' (to recall the phraseology of Brandes), but the implication is quite different. Hamsun contrives to maintain the distinction between 'sensitive' moderns and simple-minded 'inferiority' while, in effect, assigning 'disconnect-ness' and fractured psychology to everything in sight. Turning back on itself, his own rhetoric of class hierarchy and self-deification, approaches deconstructive ruin.

How might this carry over into the literary works? In order to explore this question, I will now pursue a reading of *Mysteries* (1892) alongside Strindberg's *By the Open Sea* (1890).

Aristocratic Reason/Radical Humbug

The striking contemporaneity of *By the Open Sea* and *Mysteries* is frequently noted, but rarely discussed beyond the hermeneutic grip of Harald Beyer's account, which serves principally to establish Nietzsche's (still elusive) 'influence' on Hamsun. For Beyer, the 'inner similarities' of the two novels concern 'the whole atmosphere' around Borg of *By the Open Sea* and Nagel of *Mysteries*,

their 'spiritual loneliness', the rumours they cause as strangers among local inhabitants of small Scandinavian communities, and the 'hostility' they have to endure at the hands of 'common people', resulting finally in suicide, as both Nagel and Borg throw themselves into the sea.⁴⁴ Beyer subordinates the differences, not simply between the two novels, but between 'literature' and 'polemic' in general: the figure of Nietzsche heroically posing against the roaring ocean of hostility, so to speak, closes down important differences in both form and content. In what follows then, I wish to re-examine the alleged 'similarities' between the two novels in order to trace the shifting figurations of aristocratic radicalism, as they appear and disappear, through the different narrative styles of Hamsun and Strindberg.

Although *By the Open Sea* and *Mysteries* are both structured around the arrival of 'a stranger' in a provincial Scandinavian community, the first obvious difference is that Strindberg's character, Inspector Axel Borg, unlike Johan Nilsen Nagel, is on an official 'mission' from the State. In a bureaucratic mode verging on parody, the Strindberg-text establishes that Borg was posted to Österskär by 'the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries' 'in accordance with the memorandum that the Minister for Civil Service Affairs had sent to the customs officer at Dalarö via the Board of Customs Excise' wherefore, as 'a knowledgeable Inspector of Fisheries', he was to investigate the decline of the Österskär fishing grounds, previously 'the richest in Södermand's archipelago'.⁴⁵ His arrival is greeted with the thinly veiled hostility of the locals, and the epic nature of the setting:

This was the end of the world – quiet, peaceful, deserted, except during the fishing seasons of autumn and spring – and if a single pleasure yacht arrived there in the height of the summer, it was greeted as an apparition from a brighter and happier world. But Borg, the Inspector of Fisheries, who had come on another errand – 'to spy' the inhabitants called it – was greeted with marked coldness, shown first in the indifference of the previous evening, and now by the wretchedly cold coffee brought up to his room.⁴⁶

If 'gloom' and 'despair' are the operative words here (along with a dash of comical irony), the corresponding 'atmosphere' of Hamsun's novel is a little harder to name. Whereas Strindberg's arriving stranger is met by grim hostility, Nagel is something of a sensation in that 'small Norwegian coastal town', a 'mystery' to the delight of the local inhabitants, rather than an inflated elitist everyone hates. Nagel is introduced as 'a remarkable charlatan' who keeps evading proper introduction, as indeed the nosey hotel keeper experiences:

'Hm, maybe it's rather with – well with other things that you have occupied yourself. You're a businessman perhaps?'

'No, I'm not a businessman.'

'So you're not here on business then?'

No answer. Nagel lighted a cigar and puffed slowly, looking into vacancy. The hotel keeper observed him from the side. 'Won't you play for us some day? I see you have brought your violin,' he tried again.

Nagel replied nonchalantly, 'Oh no, I'm through with that.'⁴⁷

Toying with the hotel keeper, Nagel finally says he is an 'agronomist' and a 'farmer' which, like so many things with Nagel – the violin case containing only laundry, the mysterious appearance of Nagel playing his violin much later in the novel to dazzle and confound the local inhabitants – has an air of 'humbug'. This, indeed, is the operative word, as Øystein Rottem emphasizes in his reading of *Mysteries* and the early lectures.⁴⁸ Arguing that Nagel embodies the position Hamsun espouses in 'Psychological Literature' concerning the superiority of fiction as the art of the illusory, Rottem discerns an illuminating link: 'A fact has no significance in and by itself,' says Hamsun, if it fails to 'vibrate' through the soul. 'A truth certainly has moral significance for me, but as long as I *believe* in a lie as truth, then truth has no value for me over a lie.'⁴⁹ The overriding concern for modern, psychological literature, Hamsun continues, is 'whether it creates or awakens the reader's imagination, whether it hammers on his strings, whether it *works*'.⁵⁰ Acting out this logic in *Mysteries*, then, Nagel is always telling strange stories to the slightly dazzled and seduced locals. As another critic, Jørgen Lorentzen puts it, the listeners are subjected to Nagel's stories which they don't understand: 'They listen, they ask for more stories, they tell stories about this strange man, who creates a web of stories around himself.' He enters the small town as a foreign body, disturbs convention, and generates a confrontation in which 'normal' procedures of interpretation falter.⁵¹ In the end, however, the work of humbug can be seen as turning back on Nagel, as he despairs, inwardly, of '*Komedie og Humbug og Bedrag*': 'isn't everything Comedy and Humbug and Deceit? Indeed it is, indeed it is: everything is Deceit.'⁵² As Rottem points out, the paradoxical and finally suicidal consequence of Nagel's position is that he tries to transcend '*Komedie og Humbug og Bedrag*' by means of those very same vices, by elaborate inventions, bizarre schemes and self-delusions.⁵³

To extend this, it might be said that *Mysteries* strains against both coherent literary 'Realism' and abstract 'Reason'. Hamsun brings 'humbug' into the exalted realms of aristocratic radicalism. The difference with Strindberg's *By the Open Sea* is heavily marked on this point, especially if one compares the formal innovations of the two novels, their pioneering forays (after Dostoyevsky) into 'interior monologue' and 'stream of consciousness'. Strindberg and Hamsun deploy these forms in very different ways: Nagel's internal monologue in Chapter IV of *Mysteries* is, in a sense, the demented, deranged and almost illegible counterpart to Borg's grand narrative of reason and enlightenment in Chapter III of *By the Open Sea*. Borg's internal state, here, is figured through the 'lower world' of the sea, as he gazes at the seabed through his marine telescope, observing a forest of seaweed replete with painterly imagery: 'Swaying it looks

like freshly curdled egg-white that has borrowed its shape from rippling water.⁵⁴

It was not with the dream-like imagination of the poet, or with vague and consequently disturbing emotions and confused perceptions that the beholder enjoyed this great spectacle. No, it was with the calm eyes of the scholar and conscious thinker that he detected order behind this apparent disorder. He was able with his great store of accumulated memories to arrange all his observations in relation to each other.⁵⁵

The 'lower world' is thereupon grasped by means of an evolutionary scheme, 'on the long road to clarity', from the Carboniferous era and 'the fish of primeval days', up through the Secondary, Tertiary and Quaternary eras. Placing himself in this line of development, Borg views himself as 'a representative of the historical period; and his pleasure was enhanced by the feeling that he was, on the whole, the highest link in the chain':

After communing reverently for a while with thoughts about his origins and his destiny, the inspector allowed his memory to run through the story of his personal development, as far back as he could trace it. He did this to find his way back to himself as it were, and to read his probable future in the course taken by his past.⁵⁶

In Strindberg then, the movement from 'external' description to 'internal' thought is accomplished through a series of seductive transfers, beginning with a view *of* the marine telescope to a view *through* it and, thereupon *into* the 'lower world' of the sea, from where the grand narrative of Borg's enlightenment development proceeds.

In stark contrast to the masterly seductiveness of Strindberg's literary style, which is consistently written in a third person form that preserves a sense of realist verisimilitude, Hamsun pays little heed to any realist desire to conceal the secret coercions of narration. In an abrupt split between the 'external' and the 'internal', the third person narration of *Mysteries* just stops, after which Nagel's increasingly deranged first person 'train of thought' begins. The scene is set as Nagel is awoken by Sarah, the Chambermaid, bringing him his newspapers, whereupon he reads them, laughs boisterously at an article about Gladstone's cold, and thereupon lapses into 'the following train of thought all the while talking aloud to himself from time to time'.⁵⁷ Nagel's anarchic free associations – disjointed and fragmentary – are then given in the first person, and sustained across some 10 to 15 pages until, just as abruptly, the text breaks back into the third person again: 'He jumped out of bed, raised the blinds and looked out.'⁵⁸ Whereas *By the Open Sea* grasps Borg's interiority through a narrated monologue serving to trace his personal history from the 'beginning' to the 'present', at which 'point he awoke from this revision course in his

making',⁵⁹ Nagel's streams of thought do not trace any 'personal development' nor, indeed, do they locate any 'way back to himself', as he remarks much later: 'But to come back to myself – Well, no I don't really want to come back to myself, anything but that.'⁶⁰

Coming back to Strindberg then, I shall now consider in some detail how Borg 'comes back to himself', before elaborating upon the (im)possibility of coming back to Nagel. Borg's narrated monologue is particularly interesting to read alongside *Mysteries* because Strindberg evokes here a kind of pre-history of aristocratic radicalism, following through a socio-hierarchical mindset, and clarity, that the Hamsun-text deranges. From the murky depths of pre-history, then, Borg's narrated monologue takes us through the story of the father who 'was to his son, whose mother had died early, both an example and a teacher'.⁶¹ Borg's father, the reader learns, 'had come into contact with the pantheism of the Young Hegelians' during his university days, from which he derived the notion of 'the individual as the one reality' whereas 'God was reckoned to be the personal element in humanity'. This conception 'created an élite corps of persons', a new aristocracy in the political establishment, 'who silently despised the repeated efforts of political enthusiasts':

This élite continued to press forward unnoticed, useless to either high or low. Above them they saw mediocre people collected by natural selection around a mediocre monarch. Below they met ignorance, gullibility and blindness, and in between, in the middle classes, such a marked interest in trade that, not themselves being businessmen, they were unable to work with them. But they could not join any party, and had no wish for ineffective individual opposition. They were not numerous enough to form a pack and, as strong individualists, would not follow a bell-cow. Thus they remained relatively mute, kept their discontent under lock and key, smiled like soothsayers when they met at the council table, or in the Hall of the Nobility, and left the world to its own devices.⁶²

Although described as 'a type of a high order, in which beauty and wisdom combined to produce a moderate and harmonious personality' and one that 'reckoned he belonged to the deserving aristocracy', the father's absurd megalomania soon undercuts the image of exaltation. As a topographer believing himself to be in the position of the creator, 'his regard for his own personality swelled unbelievably' and he regarded his subordinates as 'muscles serving his volitional cerebrum'.⁶³

He found the regulator for man's lower impulses in that organ which, precisely by its greater perfection, separates man from the animals, i.e. his cerebrum. Judgement, based on comprehensive knowledge, would direct and if necessary suppress lower impulses, and thus keep a man of this type on a high level. To nourish and to reproduce yourself were the lowest impulses,

because you shared these with the plants. 'Feelings', as the lower, rudimentary thought-processes of the animals were called, since they are located in the blood vessels, spinal cords and other lower organs, must of necessity be subordinated to the cerebrum of a human being of the higher type. And those individuals who could not control their lower impulses, but who thought with their spinal chords, belonged to the lower form of humanity.⁶⁴

When Borg's 'most holy feelings revolted against this dry doctrine, his father told him he was a wasp who still thought with his ganglia. He warned him against flights of fancy or conclusions based on insufficient evidence or lack of material'.⁶⁵ The oppressive terms of Borg's existence, built on 'observations and knowledge', contrast so sharply with those of Nagel in *Mysteries*, that one begins to wonder whether Hamsun, in fact, deliberately set out to write Nagel as Borg's insane counterpart, since Nagel is indeed in constant pursuit of everything Borg's philosophy consigns to the 'lower impulses', 'the dream-like imagination of the poet', 'conclusions based on insufficient evidence' and, not least, 'vague and consequently disturbing emotions and confused perceptions'.

Towards the end of Nagel's interior monologue, in which the much quoted diatribe concerning the 'great terrorist' occurs, the galloping 'train of thought' begins to conjure up an imaginary audience before whom Nagel stands – not unlike the 'golden daydreams' of Dostoyevsky's tortured narrator of *Notes from the Underground*, whose monologue keeps addressing some nonexistent 'Gentlemen', because he might be too cowardly to broadcast his views openly, 'Or perhaps I am imagining an audience in front of me on purpose so that I shall conduct myself becomingly when the time comes for me to write'.⁶⁶ The 'underground', in Dostoyevsky, is a place for the proclamations of a man 'without character' in the abyss of cerebral rambling; Nagel, in turn, plunges into the same uncouth 'underground', but is altogether less inhibited by social embarrassment and self-castigation, as he muses on the 'delicious figure' of the Chambermaid, Sarah, after which he recalls 'a marriage I once witnessed, I might even say attended': 'Hm. Gentlemen and ladies, it took place on a Sunday evening at a railroad station in Sweden, the Kungsbacka station'.⁶⁷ The recollection, of a couple's badly concealed rendezvous in the women's toilet, after which they return to their seats, she 'still fiddling with her dress', is addressed to an imaginary audience, which then becomes part of another association, memory or invention, as one metonymical link displaces the next:

What do you think? Gentlemen and ladies, my story has come to an end. I pass over the excellent lady over there, the one with the pince-nez and the stand up men's collar, that is, the blue stocking. I address myself to the two or three among you who don't spend your lives with clenched teeth, engaged in socially beneficial activity. Pardon me if I've hurt anyone's feelings; a special apology to the honourable lady with the pince-nez and the blue stockings.⁶⁸

The inversion of the conventional '*Mine Damer og Herrer*', to '*Mine Herrer og Damer*', immediately recalls the peculiar mode of address of Hamsun's Kristiania lectures: 'My Gentlemen and Ladies!' The contemporary critic, Kristofer Randers was probably not wrong when, in 1892, he asserted that *Mysteries* was 'a fantastic personification of the author's own thoughts, visions and dreams'. To this, however, should be added that the novel itself figures Nagel's 'thoughts, visions and dreams' as an unfolding 'mental debate', an absurd conversation gone awry in the strangeness of cerebral processing. The devious plot of *Mysteries* later reveals that Nagel has won notoriety in Kristiania as a humbug, who was even 'denied the floor' for his unflattering views on Gladstone, suggesting – *post festum* – that the audience in Nagel's mind was in fact a secondary elaboration of a memory.⁶⁹ Here too, the contrast with Strindberg's *By the Open Sea* is instructive, since Borg's narrated monologue serves two functions, initially, to articulate his exalted philosophy – basically that of Western metaphysics, resting on the binary opposition between mind and body – and thereupon, to set up Borg's eventual surrender to the 'lower impulses' (the 'ganglia') as he succumbs, by stages, to what is figured as the lowest, most shameful act: sex with a woman. Where Strindberg's hero is driven to suicide by an oppressive ideology that figures the body as dirty stain upon the ideals of higher refinement, Nagel's eventual suicide, which is also implicated in the tumultuous failures of romantic love, is caught up in the binaries of Western metaphysics in a different way. As I discuss in Chapter 3, Hamsun's dark comedies of love and jealousy always revolve around what Nagel calls 'Comedy and Humbug and Deceit', that which seems to compel Hamsun's masculine heroes into piling on only more 'Comedy and Humbug and Deceit', so that suicide becomes the only feasible option for narrative closure.

By the Open Sea and *Mysteries* both act out, as it were, the dormant (im)possibilities of aristocratic radicalism, and leave the door open for interpreting suicide either as an act of heroic defiance that only deifies 'the superior chosen few', or else as the dead end of aristocratic radicalism as such.

Both readings are possible, and the point here is not to choose one over the other, but rather, to underscore that aristocratic radicalism is a rhetoric caught up in the hierarchies of sex and class. Nagel's streams of thought, indeed, work over increasingly absurd encounters of sexual difference before the notorious line on 'the great terrorist' occurs. The lady in the audience with 'the pince-nez', 'the stand up men's collar' and 'the blue stocking', Nagel imagines, will object that he 'has the most uncouth masculine idea of life I've ever heard'. Another lady, however, asks a more predictable question: 'Why don't you get a movement started like Victor Hugo, she said, then you will at least be entitled to participate in the discussion.'⁷⁰ It is at this precise juncture Nagel's Nietzschean harangue begins: 'The important thing is not to produce a movement', he responds. 'The important thing is to affect and educate power, the superior chosen few, the masters of life, the great ones, Caiaphas, Pilate and the emperor.'⁷¹ This is, of course, Nagel's rewriting of Brandes'

rewriting of Nietzsche – the general insistence upon ‘solitary great men’ and the alleged need to ‘train or rear a sort of caste of pre-eminent spirits who will be able to grasp the central power’.⁷² Unlike Hamsun’s lectures, which do not go to this extreme, Nagel’s ‘cerebral lecture’ launches the hierarchical rhetoric of aristocratic radicalism with shocking gusto, denigrating ‘the crowd, the worthless majority – lawyers, schoolmarms, journalists’, while extolling the virtues of ‘the universal spirits on horsebacks’, ‘the great terrorist’ and so on.⁷³ This is framed, however, within a disjointed stream of consciousness, which is eventually displaced by a scene of sexual conquest: the lady with the pince-nez invites Nagel to her home and shows him ‘a new soft blanket, a national design, Hallingdal weave’.⁷⁴ On that uncouth suggestion, or joke at the expense of Norwegian parochialism, the interior monologue reaches its abrupt end. By its rude comedy, the Hamsun-text constantly threatens to bring the whole high-minded enterprise of aristocratic radicalism into laughable disrepute.

Day’s Residues

The narrative frames of *Mysteries* are so heavily marked by the absurd that one has to wonder how it has been possible for so many of Hamsun’s commentators – in all seriousness – to discuss Nagel’s cerebral ramblings as the expression of a univocal political or philosophical programme. Such readings are only possible on the condition that the narrative frames, like so much detritus, are peeled away and discarded. Nagel does not, in any conventional sense, *proclaim* a philosophy of aristocratic radicalism, as if he were *holding forth*, or indeed delivering a lecture, since this too quickly presumes – or short-circuits – the more complex *structure of address* operating in the literary text. What is the position of the addressee, one might ask, in the structure of the literary convention called ‘interior monologue’ – the convention pioneered in Dostoyevsky, Strindberg and Hamsun, decades before the likes of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf turned it into the emblematic form of modernism? Nagel’s mental diatribe on ‘the superior man’, is framed, first, by the characteristic form of Hamsunian interior monologue already seen in *Hunger*, the fragmentary, restless succession of one unrelated thought after another; secondly by a heightened sense of fictionality arising from the spectral audience that hovers before Nagel’s imagination; thirdly by an uncouth comedy of sexual conquest; and, finally, by subsequent references to Nagel’s reputation as a notorious humbug in public debates in Kristiania. In simulating these different positions, therefore, the text of *Mysteries* persistently staggers, divides and splits up any supposed unity in the position of the addressee. In the abyss of a subject speaking to himself, the position of the addressee parallels the motif, from Strindberg through Hamsun, of the modern person as ‘staggering, split, made

up of the old and the new', as 'agglomerations of time's faded and proximate fragments of culture, scraps of books and newspapers; bits of people'.

The attempt to brush away banal 'scraps' is, in a certain sense, what is at stake in Freud's scattered comments on 'day's residues', the 'physical residues' and 'memory traces' to which the psychoanalyst keeps returning in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The insistence of 'day's residues' in Freud's text, and the shifting positions Freud goes through in his somewhat contradictory attempt to theorize them, provide instructive insights about the difficulty of reading the general humbug storm of the Hamsun-text. Describing day's residues as 'recent but indifferent impressions left over from the previous day', Freud subordinates their importance to the determining force of 'the unconscious wish', in other words, the central thesis of this founding text of psychoanalysis.⁷⁵ Freud assigns numerous 'secondary' functions to day's residues, such as disguise and displacement, figuring them as an irritant upon the serious business of getting at the unconscious. Their recurrence, however, continues to pose problems in his analyses, so that he keeps returning to them with further qualifications: 'I am ready to admit', he announces at one point, 'that there is a whole class of dreams the instigation to which arises principally from or even exclusively from the residues of day-time life'.⁷⁶ And again: 'It must be said that they are essential ingredients in the formation of dreams', even if such daytime impressions are 'often of the most insignificant sort'.⁷⁷ It is difficult to decide, in other words, whether day's residues are essential, secondary or just insignificant. In his final attempt to deal with this, Freud suggests they are just disturbing – disconcertingly persistent:

I have only one last thing to add about the day's residues. There can be no doubt that it is they that are true disturbers of sleep and not dreams, which, on the contrary are concerned to guard it.⁷⁸

Day's residues, then, resist interpretation, resist assimilation, and are disruptive of a good night's sleep: it is the function of dreams to 'get rid of the disturbance of sleep', says Freud.⁷⁹ The grinding work of day's residues makes dreams troubling, not because they conceal hidden meanings, but because they just keep on re-appearing and dis-appearing – like writing and re-writing, reading and re-reading: the abyss of re-iteration and re-citation.

This is precisely what characterizes Hamsun's 'theory' of the unconscious in his manifesto, 'From the Unconscious Life of the Mind'; it is not the Freudian unconscious, but rather the day's residues that disturb a good night's sleep, and give rise to curious repetitions of writing. 'From the Unconscious Life of the Mind' is preoccupied with the uncanny process by which Hamsun came to write two scraps of prose in the middle of night, when he otherwise thought he was sleeping. From where, he wonders the next morning, did these banal little stories come? He later discovers the vague outline of one of these texts in *Varden*, a Norwegian-American publication from Wisconsin – a magazine he can only

have read, he conjectures, in a most distracted fashion six weeks previous when he was searching for attacks on his earlier polemic, *From the Cultural Life of Modern America*:

Meanwhile there must, then, have been a spare cell in my brain, which has discovered the story and hidden it carefully, right until that night when it again revealed itself during my sleep. And this appears to me as an occurrence of such a peculiar kind, that it demands attention.⁸⁰

'By what secret transaction', he then wonders, 'did I come into this state, a state, which I still at this moment would have been completely ignorant of, if I did not so to speak have written evidence?'⁸¹ Hamsun's early manifesto, then, was already orbiting the strange work of day's residues, before his lectures recycled so many motifs from Brandes and Strindberg, and before Nagel's interior monologue, once again, re-works the same remainders.

In the abyss of re-citation, let me summarize the trajectory of this chapter. *Mysteries* is haunted by 'influences' which have no fixed starting point or final destination, but which parallel the circular detours of Nagel as a literary figure; there is no determinate Nietzsche-effect with a teleological destination, such as fascism. This chapter has sought to explore how Hamsun's 'literary programme', inadvertently perhaps, comes to deconstruct the programmatic assumptions of 'aristocratic' sophistication in Brandes and Strindberg, exploding the idea of the crowd as a monolithic 'mass' through the critique of 'types' and 'character psychology'. The comparative analysis of *Mysteries* and *By the Open Sea* throws up further differences, which is not simply so much detritus to be passed over, but the remnants left by a writer who was, indeed, ahead of his time in many ways, and probably ahead of himself. Hamsun, unlike Brandes and Strindberg, does not uphold his 'aristocratic' superiority by way of theories of evolutionary refinement, but rather submits the fragments of these ideas to the abyss of re-citation, circulating them in the feverish imagination of Nagel, and radicalizing in singular and troubling ways the idea of 'modern characters' as 'fragments of culture, scraps of books and newspapers; bits of people'. Although Hamsun echoes Nietzsche, Brandes and Strindberg when he rejects the homogenizing stupors of bourgeois 'democratic' literature, the trouble is that he fails to realize how his own elaboration of fragmented psychology recognizes difference in a way that is far more democratic than his politics would ever accommodate.

Chapter 3

Mysteries and Pan: Sex, Class and Laughter

I had the feeling that, earlier, [reviewers] praised me studiously, and not, if I may put it thus, 'from an involuntary understanding'.

Hamsun to Bolette and Ole Larsen, 30 December 1894¹

The lyrical mood of Knut Hamsun's short novel *Pan: From Lieutenant Thomas Glahn's Papers* (*Pan. Af Løjtnant Thomas Glahns Papirer*, 1894) stands in odd contrast to the boisterous laughter of *Mysteries* (*Mysterier*, 1892). There is no comedy at the expense of 'great men' in *Pan*, and the volatile turns seem toned down – if only displaced – in the figure of Lieutenant Glahn, the self-styled 'son of the forest' who looks back on his time two years ago in the mountains around Sirilund, amid that 'endless day of the Nordland summer'.² And yet, as the lieutenant tries to lead the simple life of a hunter, 'gazing into that clear sea', 'face to face with the very bedrock of the world, my heart beating warmly against that naked bedrock and being at home there', the text has already implicated him with Edvarda, the brilliant *femme fatale* of the novel, and with a distinctly bourgeois tangle of love and deceit.³

It was a roaring critical success. Never before, wrote the smitten critic of *Bergens Tidende* in 1894, had Norwegian literature seen a 'softer or more harmonious symphony of nature': '*Pan* is a poem, wherein the temper is *whole* through and through, leaving an impression of beauty of the kind only the highest art alone can summon.'⁴ In *fin de siècle* Vienna, Lou Andreas-Salomé describes, in her 1896 essay 'A Scandinavian Poet', the hero of *Pan* as the 'human being from high culture' who 'returns to nature, not to nature in a symbolic sense'; 'no, here he treads honestly and truthfully, alongside the poet, away from the dank and dreary confinement of the cities and into the rustling forests and lonely mountain heights'.⁵ The lyrical mood of wholeness and plenitude, of high refinement and authentic union with nature, appealed both to the sensual femininity of Andreas-Salomé – Nietzsche's lost object of desire, and later Freud's intellectual match – and also, the Viennese philosopher Otto Weininger, the vociferous 'anti-feminist', who was content merely to exclaim, '*Pan* is perhaps the most beautiful novel ever written.'⁶ Generations later in 1987, the British biographer Robert Ferguson would be just as beguiled, describing *Pan* as 'seamless Art' containing 'whole oceans and forests of feeling'.⁷

Rustling somewhere in the vicinity of all this heartfelt sentiment, however, lurks a demonic repetition – *laughter*. ‘Was Pan sitting in a tree watching to see how I would comport myself?’, Glahn wonders in one of his nature reveries, ‘in order to scowl and keep an eye on me’, whereupon ‘the whole tree shook from his silent laughter when he saw that my thoughts were running away with me’.⁸ Almost a hundred years would pass before a critic, Asmund Lien, spotted that the figure of the title itself – the rustic Greek god of *Pan* – appears to be *mocking* Glahn as an urban charlatan given to flights of fancy. In a rhetorical analysis otherwise silent on the subject of laughter, Lien rightly points out that the figure of Pan functions principally to undermine the hero’s supposed union with ‘nature’.⁹ I would add, however, that ‘nature’ – that Hamsunian trope of tropes – is the name the European tradition gives to ‘sex’, and which Freud always considered a deeply troubled ‘union’. In the terms of her time, then, Andreas-Salomé was uncannily precise: Glahn represents ‘*high culture in nature*’ (*Überkultur in die Natur*); he ‘merges the vital atmosphere of nature imperceptively with erotic life’.¹⁰

There is, in other words, a complex rhetoric of sex and class involving ‘nature’ – and *laughter*. This chapter homes in on the work of repetition and laughter in Hamsun’s dark comedies of love and jealousy, Nagel’s recurring ‘Heh-heh-heh’ in the text of *Mysteries*, and Glahn’s self-deluding stratagems of sex, class and power in the text of *Pan*. Walter Baumgartner points out that Hamsun’s literary treatment of erotic desire is always articulated through the language of authority, mastery and slave-mentality.¹¹ To this observation, however, I add that it is impossible, and a great deal more disconcerting to admit, at least in the lofty realms of scholarship, that *Mysteries* and *Pan* make you laugh. For Hamsun is a very funny writer, and my argument here will be that his boisterous comedy and infectious laughter – along with the often inexplicable, self-defeating actions of his heroes – shakes up the phallogocentrism that tends to dominate traditional readings of his works. In case there is any doubt, I am not suggesting Hamsun was a feminist; my interest in *Mysteries* and *Pan* relates nonetheless to how these novels might *destabilize their own investment in masculine authority* – through laughter. This chapter proceeds, therefore, through six different senses of what might be called ‘Hamsunian laughter’: laughter as treacherous deceit; as visceral excess; as Nietzschean spite; as feminine delight; as dark irony; and as a compulsion to repeat. There is, moreover, a historical context which helps us understand why the matter of laughter, as it were, was no laughing matter for Hamsun. It is to the fading ripples of that history I now turn.

Laughter as ‘Comedy and Humbug and Deceit’

The urban frame of *Pan*, ‘the hubbub of the city’ rumbling outside the narrator’s windows, and from which his reminiscence takes flight, parallels the movements of the author.¹² Hamsun began *Pan* during his stay in Paris between

April 1893 and June 1894, after which he more or less fled to south Norway to finish the book. It was to be 'a quiet and glowing love story', wrote Hamsun in a letter from Paris, sent to his Norwegian friends Ole and Bolette Larsen on 30 October 1893: 'There will be no polemic in it; just people under a strange sky.'¹³ This desire to avoid 'polemic' came in the wake of *Mysteries* and, moreover, two other novels of social criticism from 1893, *Editor Lyngre* (*Redaktør Lyngre*) and *Shallow Soil* (*Ny Jord*). Written in rapid succession, the first launched an attack on the prominent Kristiania editor, Olav Thommessen of *Verdens Gang*, along with liberal politicians, for failing to stand up for Norway during the union with Sweden, while the second caricatured the bohemians and artists of Kristiania as decadent charlatans. Replete with risible characters designed to satirize this culture of decadence, *Editor Lyngre* and *Shallow Soil* orbit the kind of trouble that was Nagel's undoing in *Mysteries*: 'But isn't everything Comedy and Humbug and Deceit? Indeed it is, indeed it is: everything is Deceit.'¹⁴ The accusation, addressed to the Norwegian intellectual life, was swiftly returned to its sender, as the Paris letter to the Larsens bears witness:

I strolled over to the *Café de la Régence* today and there in *Morgenbladet* I read the following: 'Knut Hamsun, that apostle of humbug in Norwegian literature, the mountebank of "the new art", is revealingly characterised here as "the living embodiment of the inadequacies and of certain vacuities in Norwegian civilization"'.¹⁵

Hamsun was mortified, 'deprived of all honour, all talent, all decency', he complained, fearing there was 'something irresponsible, dishonourable, spurious in everything I do'.¹⁶ It was hardly a case of paranoia, however, because there had been a steady build up of criticism like this since his lecture tour of 1891. The *Verdens Gang* editor, Olav Thommessen (soon to be the subject of thinly veiled character assassination in *Editor Lyngre*), had berated Hamsun for 'throwing filth over Henrik Ibsen'; the grand master of Norwegian theatre was himself present at the 1891 lectures in Kristiania, and was forced to endure, the editor raged, Hamsun's 'course in ignorance, shallowness and cheek'.¹⁷ Others, meanwhile, gossiped about the author's carousing and sexual prowess. As Ferguson observes, the novelist Arne Garborg described Hamsun as 'a handsome man, dangerous to all women, striking and interesting'; Bolette Larsen, with whom Garborg corresponded, told him of Hamsun's lectures in Bergen: 'all the women, all of them were at his feet'.¹⁸ The public image, in other words, was that of a cad, provocateur and charlatan; a source of scandal, rumour, and mirth. In a caricature wittily entitled 'Hunger', a Bergen magazine depicted Hamsun at the dinner table, fork in hand, about to devour a potato-sized head of Ibsen; after his lectures in Kristiania, another caricature portrayed Hamsun in a triumphant pose, on a pile of severed heads – of the literary deities of the day, Ibsen, Bjørnson, Garborg, etc. – decapitated by Hamsun's bloody sword, with a crowd of enchanted women looking on, above which floats a man with

hat and cape, extending a wreath 'From Mr. Barnum', the legendary circus director, con artist and hoaxer.¹⁹ The humbug storm appears to have reached its apex during his lecture to the Copenhagen Student Society in Denmark, March 1893. 'Knut Hamsun appears in Copenhagen and talks about literature amid boisterous hilarity,' wrote Garborg in Norway shortly after. Striking a well-aimed blow at the autodidact, Garborg haughtily suggests that his compatriot might do better 'to set about humbly *studying* Shakespeare, Goethe and so on, than to run around like a common fool getting people to laugh at them'.²⁰

Hamsun seems encircled by 'boisterous hilarity' at this time, yet his letters observe a fastidious silence about the Copenhagen affair. He barely mentions it, that is, until five years later in 1898, in a letter to Georg Brandes. The scene is deeply intriguing, but encloses its secret in the mutual understanding of the sender and the addressee:

[Ibsen's *The Master Builder*] was out, and there was a hundred different opinions about it. I pushed my way down into the hall to you and asked: 'If not even you and your brother are agreed in your views of this man and this book . . .' You replied: 'Yes, so what?' But the people in the hall roared because they wanted more circus, and I became confused and had to stop.²¹

It leaves us wondering. The audience 'roared'. Was this, in fact, a roar of laughter? Lars Frode Larsen's meticulous documentation of Hamsun's early works, and the plethora of responses these provoked, makes it possible, now, to discern that Hamsun, as it turns out, was a great orchestrator of laughter who fell foul of his own schemes. His lecture, 'A Little on Literature' ('*Lidt om Literatur*', 1893) regurgitates much of the 1891 lecture tour, but focuses its rhetoric of rejection on Ibsen, the overrated dramatist hopelessly caught in simplistic 'character psychology', according to Hamsun. Opening on a note of self-irony and flippant bravado, Hamsun says: 'I want, according to my poor ability, to explain something, utter an opinion and to mock.'²² At one point, he mischievously invites the audience to 'imagine Ibsen up against some thinkers, just take a few, and cast your eyes over all of them – if you can't cry, then I am sure you'll have to laugh!'²³ This 'witty and paradoxical' lecture, the Danish daily *Politiken* reported afterwards, 'was interrupted by boisterous hilarity' and 'every now and then by furious disquiet'.²⁴ Larsen, the inveterate archival detective, notes that the Danish journalist quotes and paraphrases several sections of Hamsun's lecture, while registering the noisy reactions of the audience in no less than *nineteen* parentheses: '(mirth)', '(laughter)', '(boisterous hilarity)'. Hamsun's remark that he would 'explain spectral analysis to a Danish peasant woman so she understands it' was greeted with '(loud laughter)'; his witty suggestion that parts of the Copenhagen audience may indeed accept, as a serious proposition, that the wall they were staring at was a coffee kettle, was met with an eruption of '(boisterous hilarity)'.²⁵ The laughter of the crowd was no longer on Hamsun's side, however, when Brandes rose to speak afterwards and, as legend has it,

'knocked him flat in an instant'.²⁶ Excavating the archive, Larsen verifies the anecdote with another press report, from the Danish paper *Kjøbenhavn*, according to which Hamsun had made a 'helpless' attempt to defend himself against 'Dr G. Brandes who, in an intellectual and superior manner, picked several of his harmful assertions to bits and pieces'.²⁷

Hamsun's letter to Brandes finally begins to make sense: 'Yes, so what?' shrugged the great Danish critic at Hamsun's banalities on Ibsen, whereupon the merry crowd gave its 'roar'. Was the 'roar', then, in fact a *mirthful jeer*? It seems likely, but Larsen does not speculate. Sticking ruthlessly to the facts, the great Hamsun scholar notes another fascinating twist. Jeppe Aakjær, an author who recalled Hamsun's lecture 40 years after the event, described the scene as follows: 'Georg Brandes sat on the front bench and was contorted with laughter. When the speaker finished his lecture, Brandes received him with a smile, embraced him and said: "I love you, Knut Hamsun."' ²⁸ When Hamsun, now in his 70s, read Aakjær's version of events, he was mortified all over again: 'It says that Brandes shook with laughter [*skoggerlo*] during the lecture', he complains in a letter from 1930: 'When he afterwards embraced me with those unreserved ironic words, he destroyed me completely, annihilated me.'²⁹ Laughter, indeed, is no laughing matter.

Like 'the return of the repressed', then, the laughter of the Copenhagen crowd would pursue Hamsun for decades. The Freudian sense of return and repetition, as always returning and repeating itself *in the vicinity* of a traumatic event, is indeed pertinent here; the sense by which *laughter*, in this case, comes back in multiple disguises, through what Freud would call 'displacement' and 'condensation'. Freud always emphasizes the importance, not simply of the dark, traumatic event itself, but of the 'symbolism' of 'the return' as such – *returning*. For my purposes, this perspective opens up a *socio-historical* dimension to what might otherwise be reduced to mere psychobiography: sex and class.

Hamsun's letter to Brandes, where the 'roar' is mentioned is dated Christmas Eve 1898, and displaces and condenses an earlier letter he sent to Brandes, on 25 November 1898, where he complained bitterly of a recent review of his latest novel, *Victoria: A Love Story* (*Victoria: En Kærligheds Historie*, 1898). It had caused him to doubt, he told Brandes, 'whether there is any use in my continuing'. Enclosing the offending review, along with a copy of *Victoria*, Hamsun writes: 'I would now like to ask for your verdict, if you are able to give it. I would be grateful for just a card.'³⁰ The review and the grovelling letter it provoked repeat and condense something else – *not* the Copenhagen lecture, but the incident at the Paris café seven months thereafter, when he discovered that the Norwegian literary establishment was calling him 'the apostle of humbug'. Then, as now, it was the critic Nils Vogt who attacked Hamsun in the pages of the Norwegian highbrow cultural magazine, *Morgenbladet*; and, then as now, the negative publicity provoked a series of letters with pleas for support from friends and publishers. But while the previous attack, as Hamsun bitterly recalled again and again in letters from 1893, had ridiculed him as an 'apostle of humbug',³¹ the

most recent attack on *Victoria* was just nasty. Vogt had declared that *Victoria* exhibited the author's ignorance of the upper classes and, twisting the knife, his inability to portray 'really fine ladies'.³² He was attacked, in other words, in the language of sex and class, indeed, *of social class in sexualized terms*. That the attack was mean-spirited is clear when we recall that Hamsun had written *Victoria* shortly after his marriage to Bergljot Goepfert, the daughter of a well-to-do sea captain and, hence, a 'fine lady' of considerable social standing – quite a catch, Vogt probably smirked, for a 'peasant'.

Hamsun's reaction is fearless – and eerily circular: he overrides the Norwegian highbrow magazine and addresses himself, directly, to a higher authority, the Danish critic Georg Brandes. Much like Kafka's 'man from the country' in the parable 'Before the Law', who begs for admittance to the Law but remains forever *before* the law, Hamsun approaches the 'doorkeeper' of the European canon, the author of *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature* (1872–1875), who resides in Copenhagen, the 'Nordic Athens'. In so doing, however, Hamsun receives a reply (now lost), which evidently forces him to recall that 'roar' in Copenhagen, the moment that would return 40 years later as the contorted laughter of the great man who had (probably inadvertently) 'annihilated' him. This helps us to understand, I think, a crucial shift in Hamsun's figurations of laughter in *Mysteries* and *Pan*, but I shall qualify this point a little first.

Laughter as Excess

One tends to assume, as Paul de Man says, that 'the life' produces 'the work', and not the other way round, whereby 'the work' produces 'the life'.³³ Biographies always attempt to conjure up the fullness of human presence and the author's 'intentions' while subordinating *the work of writing as such*. The fallacy of psychobiography, Maud Ellmann writes after Derrida, 'is to subordinate the writing to the writer, to treat "the work" as merely the representation of "the life"'. In the field of philosophy and theory, Derrida uses the 'autobiographical', says Ellmann, to trace 'the intrusion of the accidents of writing into the abstractions of pure reason'.³⁴ In the field of literature and art, I would specify, autobiographical inscriptions allow us to trace that which destabilizes the impression of aesthetic 'unity' and 'wholeness'. In a Freudian and Derridean sense, then, we are concerned with that which art can never fully contain or exclude, write or un-write – in this case, laughter.

To this comes the uncanny manner by which *Mysteries*, originally published *before* the Copenhagen affair, prescribes in advance the kind of laughter to which Hamsun was to be an unwitting victim: the fickle laughter of the crowd turning on the subject who orchestrates laughter. Thus, in that 'small Norwegian coastal town', when 'Nagel happened to come across Miniman all of a sudden', Miniman enters the hotel café, having delivered a bag of coal. He bows 'politely right and left' to the locals, but is greeted 'with loud yells of laughter'.³⁵

Describing Miniman as 'exceptionally ugly', with 'calm blue eyes, but horrible protruding front teeth and an extremely twisted gait because of a physical defect', the third-person narration performs a double function, that of external description, and that of simulation, as it more or less inhabits the viewpoint of the locals.³⁶ At the mercy of the crowd, Miniman is then subjected to the ritual humiliations of 'the Deputy Judge' who leads the way in bullying the poor outcast, using bribes and threats to make him grind his teeth: 'You *can't*? Ha-ha, surely you can' laughs the Deputy: 'You are brilliant at grinding your teeth'.³⁷

At last Miniman grinds his terrible teeth, amid the loud laughter of the bystanders. Nagel is ostensibly still reading his paper, sitting quietly in his place by the window.

'Louder, louder!' cries the Deputy. 'Grind them more loudly, or we can't hear you.'

Miniman sits stiffly upright, holding on to his chair with both hands as if afraid of falling off, grinding his teeth, so his head quivers. Everybody laughs, the peasant woman laughs so hard that she has to wipe her eyes; not knowing what to do for laughter, she senselessly spits twice on the floor in sheer delight.³⁸

The Deputy goads the crowd on to the point of orgiastic surplus, climaxing in a figure of feminine excess, as the peasant woman's *jouissance*-in-laughter discharges onto the floor. This is a fickle laughter, however, showing 'people's inclination to agree with the victor of the moment' when Nagel – eventually – intervenes as Miniman's saviour. Flummoxed and humiliated at being confronted, verbally outwitted, and finally physically overpowered by Nagel, the Deputy becomes the laughing stock, as he marches out of the café with 'two big dents in his hat as he left, giving him a comical appearance'.³⁹

But it doesn't end here. Having carried out his heroic and noble act, Nagel invites Miniman to his hotel room for a cigar and a drink, whereupon he immediately begins to torment the outcast along similar lines, by proposing new humiliating acts for him, tempting him with bribes. Just as the hapless Miniman is about to consent to walking around town with a paper bag stuck to his back, however, Nagel again reverses the presuppositions. He asks, respectfully, for Miniman's real name – Grøgaard – and goes on: 'I'll gladly give you this ten-kroner bill because you *didn't* want to do what I proposed to you.' The bewildered Miniman is lost for words and, 'in his joy' has to 'fight back his tears'.⁴⁰ Much later, and once again overwhelmed by Nagel's devious benevolence, Miniman is lost in laughter: 'I thank you, anyway, against your wish; but now I am so confused that it's spooky; its as if everything is loose inside me and can't stay still. Ha-ha-ha-ha!'⁴¹

This is disconcertingly funny, and funnily disconcerting, because it is difficult to sort out what is funny and what is not. If the reader laughs, it is not clear at

whose expense this laughter is directed, whether it is at the crowd's eruptions into carnivalesque delight (so cruelly at the expense of Miniman's deformities, and in which the narration itself seems to take cruel delight); or at the spluttering laughter of the peasant woman (in which case the reader's laughter would be at the expense of the 'lower' classes); or at the defeat of the Deputy (by which time one's own laughter would be as fickle as that of the crowd). The text does not simply portray laughter as excess, it enacts its shrill twists and turns – implicating the reader in the textuality of laughter. The reader's laughter simulates, as it were, the laughing text, which registers its effects all over Miniman's body, as tears well up, and 'everything is loose inside'.

If this sounds like a bad case of diarrhoea, the sense is perhaps not altogether accidental, since Nagel's streams of thought, indeed, figure laughter as *a shameful bodily expulsion*. It is in this context that one notices a very marked tendency in the retrospective deletions and revisions Hamsun made to the text of *Mysteries*, several years *after* the Copenhagen affair. A certain flight from the excess of laughter does, indeed, appear to be at work in at least two supplementary ways. Hamsun curtails, first of all, the sheer quantity of laughter coming from Nagel's mouth, cutting back those juddering transliterations – 'Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh' – if only a little: 'Heh-heh-heh'. His revisions affect, moreover, laughter as a topic of speculation in Nagel's stream of consciousness; where the 1892 edition reads as follows:

'Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh, what the hell do I have to do with it? How many strange sounds there are in a human being! Take laughter, for instance; where does it come from and where does it go? A disgusting sound, a shameless sound, a sound reminiscent of magpies and monkeys. Laughter must simply be a rudiment, *ergo*, laughter is a rudiment. And this meaningless, unarticulated sound is expelled from some place or other in my body, just by someone tickling me under my chin.⁴²

The *Collected Works* (*Samlede Verker*, 1954) rewrites the passage thus:

Heh-heh-heh. What the hell do I lie here laughing at? Is it supposed to show my superiority? Only children should be allowed to laugh, and very young girls, nobody else. Laughter is a survival from simian times, a disgusting and shameless sound that comes out the wrong way. It's expelled from some place or other in my body, just by someone tickling me under my chin.⁴³

The original emphasis on strangeness – of laughter as a 'strange' 'meaningless, unarticulated sound' – is now deleted, giving way to a tone that is altogether more censorious. Laughter is in both versions 'disgusting' and 'shameless', and likened to a noxious bodily expulsion, or a prehistoric rudiment, but where the original designates laughter as radically *heterogeneous* ('where does it come from and where does it go?'), the revision removes the question and asserts that

laughter only 'comes out the wrong way'. Unlike the original, moreover, the later version now figures laughter as *self-satisfied superiority*, suggesting that only children and 'very young girls' (figures of innocence, that is), would escape the dishonourable implication. Laughter, then, becomes an increasingly volatile matter in the 1890s works, a hazard to be curtailed, controlled and policed, rather than revelled in with free abandon. From here, it seems a different kind of laughter increasingly takes precedence in the tropology of the Hamsun-text – that of *spite*. The word 'spite', I will argue, is what Nagel's name in fact names: '*nag*' (Dano-Norwegian for 'spite'). This gives a name, I suggest furthermore, to the most abiding logic, and innovative daring, of Hamsun's narrative technique.

Laughter as Spite

In a useful distinction between two senses of 'dark, sardonic, wicked humour', Simon Critchley designates the 'golden Nietzschean laughter of tragic affirmation' as a '*manic* laughter: solitary, hysterical, verging on sobbing. This is the ego bloated and triumphant in empty solitude'. 'On the other hand', he continues, is a 'more sardonic' laughter, 'which arises out of a palpable sense of inability, inauthenticity, impotence and impossibility'.⁴⁴ The laughter of Hamsun's masculine heroes tends towards the Nietzschean version, for example, when the hero of *Hunger* fools a policeman and laughs 'like a madman' in the empty solitude of his triumph over authority: 'And not a sound emerged from my throat; my laughter was feverish and silent, with the intensity of tears.'⁴⁵ But whereas the *Hunger*-hero often laughs helplessly and *in spite* of his own ruin, Nagel laughs more *to spite* authority, not least the position of 'great men': 'Heh-heh-heh, its an ever-recurring comedy!'⁴⁶ The link to Nietzsche has a very specific resonance, here, going back to Brandes' explication of slave-morality in 'An Essay on Aristocratic Radicalism', which Hamsun certainly read, and which appears to designate the very moral-in-Nagel: *Nagmoral*.

Nietzsche makes a violent, passionate attempt to refer the sum total of false modern morality, not to the instinct of requital or to the feeling of revenge in general, but to the narrower form of it which we call spite [*Nag*, also: 'grudge', 'resentment'], envy and *rancune*. What he calls slave morality is to him purely spite-morality [*Nagmoral*]; and this spite-morality gave new names to all ideals. Thus impotence, which offers no reprisal, became goodness; craven baseness became humility; submission to him who was feared became obedience.⁴⁷

Critical readings of *Mysteries* always identify Miniman as the bearer of slave-morality, the humble, wretched outcast who, in spite of himself, embraces his humiliation in abject subordination. Thus, for Otto Weininger, Miniman was 'the greatest' portrayal of the 'dog-type' in literature, the 'symbol of baseness:

the *slave mentality*'.⁴⁸ This reading ignores, however, Hamsun's own sense that Miniman is Nagel's '*andet jeg*' – his 'other ego'.⁴⁹ Miniman's slave mentality, then, can only reflect back on Nagel, precisely, as *Nagmoral* or Nagel-morality. The moment Nagel, towards the end of the novel, supposedly *unmasks* Miniman's 'slave mentality' is thus nothing but the unmasking of himself: 'I shall rip off your mask and make you betray your true nature', says Nagel to Miniman, accusing his thunderstruck double of being a fraud:

Even at this moment I believe you're sitting there laughing inwardly, that despite your despairing, crushed expression you are still laughing a secret, swinish laugh at my inability to do you any harm for lack of evidence.⁵⁰

Nagel perceives in Miniman a 'secret, swinish laugh' – which is to say – *his own* spiteful laughter (heh-heh-heh) mirrored back at him from his 'other ego'. The laughter of excess, then, turns into the laughter of spite, turning in on itself, *via its reduplication in the other*.

Only in *Pan* is the laughter of spite turned into a precise tropology, serving accurate narrative functions – a poetry of its own, even – in the self-deluding stratagems of sex and class. The self-styled 'son of the forest', Glahn, is caught in the logic of spite from beginning to end, not least in bourgeois company, where he is generally ill at ease, and keeps spilling his wine. Thus, when Edvarda (the canny *femme fatale* of the novel) '*brast i latter*', 'burst out laughing' at Glahn's social ineptitude, his internal reaction is spiteful: 'An obscure feeling of resentment shot through me at Edvarda's laughter, I looked at her and found that her face had become insignificant and unattractive.'⁵¹ In relegating Edvarda's laughter to an inferior rank, to that of the 'insignificant' and 'unattractive', Glahn only reduplicates the codes of social class, the very codes, in other words, that bring about his humiliation. Edvarda's laughter repeatedly sends Glahn into the kind of turmoil only Hamsun can write, as is illustrated in Glahn's famously self-defeating actions during the party out on the small islands of *Korholmerne*, in Chapter XV, and the ball Edvarda holds at her father's house in the centre of the village, in Chapter XVII.

The first incident results in Glahn's farcical attempt to assert himself by parading his fly-book before the perplexed and bemused guests on *Korholmerne*. This bizarre and endearingly hapless attempt to impress occurs after several hours of being ignored by Edvarda, and of being ill at ease amid bourgeois chatter. The moment of cracking up is precise: 'My ears were ringing with the conversation behind me, and I could hear Edvarda laughing. At that laughter I suddenly got up and walked over to the company. My agitation was running away with me.'⁵² Later, when Edvarda invites Glahn to her ball and convinces him that she is devoted to him after all, he is joyful yet spiteful towards himself as he notices her looking 'thoughtfully' at him as he walks away: 'A laughable joy smiles through me.'⁵³ The ball, unsurprisingly, turns out much the same: 'Edvarda's laughter

rang fresh and carefree through the room. But why didn't she have a word for me anymore?'⁵⁴ Noticing that 'the Doctor', with whom Edvarda often keeps company, is once again the centre of everyone's attention, Glahn winds up laughing at the Doctor's witticisms, *in spite* of himself, but also *to spite* Edvarda's expectation that he should play the role of the Doctor's rival:

Can *that* be my rival? I thought, and I also thought of his lame leg and sorry figure. He had acquired a new and witty oath, he said, 'death and torment' [*død og pinsel*], and each time he used this curious oath I laughed aloud. In my anguish, it occurred to me to give this man every advantage I could, as he was my rival. [. . .] I said: Listen to what the Doctor is saying! And I forced myself to laugh aloud at his ways of speaking. [. . .] Splendid! I shrieked, coughing from laughter, though I wasn't the least bit intoxicated. Edvarda, too, seemed to be carried away.⁵⁵

One counterintuitive turn then follows another. When the Doctor 'forgets' his walking stick on departing, Edvarda hands it to Glahn (spitefully, but 'trembling'); when he protests, she replies that he is no match for that 'lame man', the Doctor. On his way home, Glahn then encounters the limping Doctor returning for his stick, and proceeds to torment him 'as if he were a dog', commanding him to leap over the hunting rifle Glahn carries. *Despite* this provocation, however, the Doctor calmly responds by suggesting there might be 'something wrong' with Glahn, at which the hero is 'overwhelmed with shame and despair'.⁵⁶ Back at his hut, Glahn is mortified at having shown his torment to the Doctor: 'It annoyed me that I had held him round his waist and looked at him with moist eyes; he would gloat over it, I thought, perhaps he's giggling over it with Edvarda at this very moment'.⁵⁷ Then, as if to incarnate the figural sense by which Hamsun's heroes always shoot themselves in the foot, Glahn points the gun at his foot, and fires.

The tropology of laughter and spite indicates, I suggest, a more general trope in Hamsun's works, which might be called 'narrative spite', where sequential events proceed according to a logic that is 'in spite of' the reader's expectations, and 'in spite of' the character's apparent motivations. This also spites, as were, the expectations of realism. It is no accident that Hamsun's riddling plot structures fascinated his psychoanalysts (always keen to spot the next castration motif). With regard to spite, however, one only has to read the Hamsun-text: Glahn laughs at the Doctor in spite of himself; Edvarda hands him the stick in spite of knowing full well to whom it belongs; the Doctor reacts with compassion in spite of Glahn's cruel attempt to torment him; and Glahn, finally, reduces himself to the position of the 'lame' Doctor. His 'self-castration' serves two spite-ridden functions, first, to invade the territory of the Doctor as Edvarda's object of desire, and secondly, *to spite the menace of the other's laughter by turning himself into the double of the other*. Who's laughing now?

Ruptures and Ripples: Feminine Laughter

Edvarda's laughter keeps sending Glahn into a 'laughable' turmoil, which does not mean, however, that feminine laughter is figured as spiteful. The Hamsun-text is much more precise: feminine laughter *provokes* masculine spite, for example, when *Mysteries* designates the peasant woman's laughter as 'senseless', or when Glahn finds Edvarda's laughter 'unattractive'. The texts thereby simulate the mechanism whereby feminine laughter is censured by masculine 'poetic' refinement. This entails, at the same time, an attempt to *recuperate* feminine laughter: *Mysteries* simulates the free abandon of laughter as much as it curtails it, while Glahn castrates himself in order to laugh, as it were, 'from the other side'. The text of *Pan* orchestrates the same changeover in Glahn's nature reveries, in his erotic fantasies of the mythical lovers Iselin and Diderik, in which the woman, Iselin, moves freely from one amorous encounter to the next, as her 'loud, merry laughter rings through the forest', 'exultant and sinful from top to toe'.⁵⁸ Here, in Chapter VIII, nature reverie assumes the form of a male fantasy, in which Iselin moves from Diderik to the 'hunter', Glahn's ego-ideal. In Chapter XX, however, and *after* the foot-shooting incident, the nature reveries undergo a transformation, and finally inhabit the 'feminine' position, through the first-person narration of Iselin – which is to say, the polymorphous sensuality of Glahn – emitting the joyous laughter that commemorates the bright midsummer night of amorous cavorting, in the words of Iselin: 'What can it be that ripples through me? I thought laughing'; 'Where can I have rumpled my dress, I thought, laughing.'⁵⁹ The mythical lovers of Glahn's flights into mother earth appear, in another sense, as 'embedded' tales, punctuating the 'realist' progression of events, thus forming a general contrast-in-parallel to the turmoil of masculine angst in the world of the small-town bourgeoisie. Whereas laughter seems irredeemably harsh in the world of the bourgeoisie, producing only spite, the mythical stories intervene to contrast this with the warm, joyous and 'sinful' laughter of Iselin. In Glahn's fantasies, which turn into embedded mythical stories, Iselin's laughter 'rings through the forest', just like Edvarda's laughter, in the world of the bourgeoisie, 'rings' in Glahn's ears and 'through the room' to beguile and annihilate him. It is the laughter of free abandon, which also belongs to Dagny Kielland in *Mysteries*, the Parson's daughter Miniman describes to Nagel as follows: 'She laughs quite loudly when she is amused by something, and she often laughs about almost nothing.'⁶⁰ It is the laughter, furthermore, of those 'really fine ladies' whom Hamsun was later accused of not knowing; the laughter that, in *Mysteries* and *Pan*, exceeds the hierarchies of social class as assuredly as it sends the male figures crashing into these same cruel hierarchies.

It is instructive, at this juncture, to recall what Freud's 1910 paper called 'A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men', and how his colleague, the Vienna psychoanalyst Eduard Hitschmann, observed this in Hamsun's works. If a 'mother fixation' remains the 'necessary condition for loving', says Freud,

it involves an 'injured third party', as 'the person in question shall never choose as his love-object a woman who is disengaged'.⁶¹ Noting this common 'pathology' in Hamsun's works, Hitschmann also associates it with class:

It is always about love involving some injured third party, that which Freud identified as typical of the mother fixation. All the adorable feminine characters in Hamsun are mothers in the following sense: One must take her away from a man in order to possess her. A second characteristic of his loving devotion is that the female nature is often proud and, first and foremost, unapproachable, postponing her decision for a long time. She thereby humiliates him, for she is also socially distinguished, a parson's or merchant's daughter; in addition she humiliates him by the fact that she is already in love or practices betrayal.⁶²

The trope of the 'injured third party' concerns the perpetual recurrence of the impossibility around which the 'mother fixation' is structured, as the loved one in Goethe indeed puts it: 'Why me of all people, Werther?', 'I belong to another, so why me? I fear very much that what makes the desire to possess me so attractive is its very impossibility.'⁶³ The association to *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) was not lost on Otto Stoessel, writing in 1935 of his time in *fin de siècle* Vienna: 'the effect of *Mysteries* and *Pan* at that time must have been similar to that of Goethe's *Werther* in its time.'⁶⁴ This is also useful, because it indicates what psychobiography would simply reduce to 'pathology', namely, a literary effect.

Hamsun, indeed, recycles the 'Werther-effect' with twists and turns that make *The Sorrows of Young Werther* look tame. Even though Goethe ends his novel with the gruesome physicality of suicide, his fan and follower, Hamsun, foregrounds to a much greater extent the sheer force of repetition and compulsive obsession. Thus, when Nagel declares his undying love for Dagny Kielland in the eleventh chapter of *Mysteries* (knowing full well the parson's daughter is engaged to a naval officer of wealthy pedigree), his sentimental rhetoric turns into that of the compulsive stalker: 'Do you know, I've wandered about in front of your home at night, trying to catch a glimpse of you at a window.'⁶⁵ He goes on and on: 'You've become my constant thought, my compulsive thought [*Tvangstanke*], I see you in all things and call every blue stream Dagny.'⁶⁶ Nagel's confessional monologue takes up so much text-space that it envelops, and tends to erase, the feminine other who, nevertheless, keeps staring back *through* his incessant talk, with mute objections and ambiguous smiles:

'How I've longed for you these last few days!', he said. 'No, no, don't be so frightened [. . .] I love you Miss Kielland. Well, I really don't see why you should be so astonished; I'm made of flesh and blood, I met you and I fell in love with you [. . .] You're smiling? Sure, it's laughable, I know; but there's no helping it'.⁶⁷

In the face of feminine laughter, Nagel winds up begging Dagny to *keep quiet*, that is, to let her status as elevated object, as fetish, live on in his mind without her fleshly interference: 'If I dared ask anything of you now, I would ask you to shut up. I love you, but shut up, shut up. Wait three minutes.'⁶⁸ The devious plotting devices of *Mysteries* add another twist: another woman whose impending arrival is announced, already, in the opening lines of *Mysteries*. It's a proleptic trick of Hamsun's narration, the logic of which appears to have escaped critical readings. The opening frame of the book, and of several chapters, function as *multiple prolepses that feign ignorance*. 'a certain Nagel' arrives in town, 'did a lot of curious things and then disappeared as suddenly as he had come'. Before the comedy of Nagel's arrivals by departure ensues, however, the proleptic frame adds: 'What's more, this man was visited by a mysterious young lady, who came on heaven knows what business.'⁶⁹ Like Nagel, she appears, only to disappear. She (dis)appears again in the frame of chapter eleven, the very chapter in which Nagel declares his love for Dagny: 'there even appeared a stranger in town, a veiled lady who disappeared again.'⁷⁰ She finally arrives in the next chapter, named Kamma – 'Just Kamma' – at which point, however, the narration veils the 'veiled lady' in an 'intermittent and obscure' conversation with Nagel, 'with half-words of which they alone understood the meaning, and with many meaningless allusions to the past'.⁷¹ She knows him well, and laughs at his antics in the small town (after Hamsun's ellipsis): 'How could you dream of sneaking off to a place like this? But don't you think I'd find you? So you're an agronomist here, eh? Ha-ha-ha.'⁷² In the narration, then, Kamma hovers about Nagel's obsession with Dagny, as an uncanny double, coming back at him with a devastating laugh. She is laughing, let us note, at his farcical antics as an *agronomist*, and here we encounter a much darker, haunting laughter.

Laughter as Dark Irony

Kamma is identified *by name* in the eleventh chapter of *Mysteries*, appearing and disappearing around Dagny Kielland; she has already (dis)appeared – in another devious twist of narration – in Nagel's streams of thought as 'my little Danish Kamma', where she is described as 'full of devotion' yet 'capable of wheedling the last penny out of you'.⁷³ In Nagel's stream of thought, '*danske Kamma*' is a figure of desire frustrated, of consummated love beyond the point of renewable devotion, the uncanny double of Dagny Kielland, the flip side, so to speak, of 'DK'. In Freud, they would be surrogates of 'something irreplaceable', which can be 'broken up into an endless series: endless for the reason that every surrogate nevertheless fails to provide the desired satisfaction'.⁷⁴ What 'desired satisfaction'?

The Hamsunian 'answer' comes in another configuration of the double: 'Miniman Grøgaard' and 'Martha Gude', who share the initials 'MG', which is very spooky indeed, as MG is also the abbreviation of 'Markens Grøde', *Growth*

of the Soil (1917), Hamsun's 'back to land' novel written over 20 years later. In the face of laughter, my reading is essentially this: the Danish currency (DK) is haunted by the inscription of the soil (MG). Nagel is immediately obsessed with Miniman and, thereupon, Martha Gude, both of whom occupy the bottom rung of the class hierarchy of the small town. The traditional psychoanalytic reading of Martha Gude, according to which she is the object of Nagel's mother fixation, is only half right.⁷⁵ For Martha moves *in the vicinity* of the bourgeois 'Werther-complex'; once married but now abandoned, she has been left a peniless spinster selling eggs for a living, trading in the stunted growth and arrested reproduction that is her destiny. Appearing as 'that pale egg-wife' in Nagel's streams of thought,⁷⁶ Martha is beyond motherhood, but eventually becomes, for Nagel, the object of a fantasy, as it were, of returning to 'Mother Earth', as becomes so eerily apparent when (smarting from Dagny's rejection of him) Nagel makes a risible proposition of marriage – to Martha: 'they would buy a little cottage and a plot of ground in the forest', he promises, 'it would be their very own and they would call it Eden, and he would cultivate it – oh, he would cultivate it!' Nagel, indeed, appears to be writing his own version of Hamsun's Nobel Prize winning novel 25 years before the event, complete with the traditional segregation of labour between menfolk and womenfolk: 'while he dug and chopped and tilled the ground', promises Nagel, 'she would tend the animals'.⁷⁷

This heralds those dark zones of *Mysteries* and *Pan* where laughter ceases, or else comes back as a shrill, haunted laughter. In Nagel's internal monologue, Martha 'has looked at me so sheepishly, as if she wanted to ask for something'. He's gone out his way 'four times to avoid meeting her', yet keeps pursuing her, finding out that she lives in 'a tiny little house by the quayside', 'a one-story house' with 'no curtains'. It is no longer clear, however, who is pursuing whom: 'she was standing far back in the room staring at me as I walked by'.⁷⁸ Like Dagny with her mute objections rupturing the male fantasy, Martha Gude also stares back, but without smiles, and without laughter, only heart-felt sentiment, and ruddy honesty. The storyline of *Mysteries* cruelly undermines Nagel's fantasy, however, by means of Dagny Kielland's jealous meddling.

The same kind of trouble, with a different elaboration, afflicts the dreamy 'son of the forest' in *Pan*, where Edvarda's refined class is a counterpoint to the down-to-earth peasant girl Eva. Another contrast-in-parallel, then, does its work: Glahn's affair with Edvarda is riddled with spite and deceit, whereas his affair with Eva is lusty, steamy and uncomplicated; Eva's name is split in Edvarda's name – E(d)v(ard)a – and in the story itself, she is blown to bits by Glahn's implication in the bourgeois tangle of love and deceit. Edvarda's father, who is jealous of Glahn, because of his relationship with Eva, puts the peasant girl to work near the site of a dynamite blast – being planned by Glahn. The hero knows very well where Eva is working, but is distracted by other thoughts, about Edvarda & co. The interweaving plot structures of *Pan* produce dark irony, and uncanny horror. On discovering what he has done, Glahn is seized by 'violent

agitation: lying there was a boat, crushed by a fallen rock, and Eva – Eva lay beside it, smashed to bits, split open by a blow, her side and abdomen cut up beyond recognition'.⁷⁹

In reading the codifications of sex and class in *Mysteries* and *Pan* as a complex rhetoric of figures and tropes, meticulously plotted into narration, one discovers a dark underbelly of ambivalence. On first reading, Nagel's laughter at the expense of Norwegian peasants draws a funny caricature, but on second reading, isn't this laughter also haunted? One only has to read: 'heh-heh, oh yes, there was the native, with the crust of bread under his arm and the cow in tow! Oh, what a sight! Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh, God help you, my noble Norse Viking!'⁸⁰

Laughter as a Compulsion to Repeat

Freud's psychoanalysis, like Hamsun's fictions, orbits the creepy logic of repetition. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud writes of the organism's circular drift back to 'an old state of things',⁸¹ and, in the earlier essay, 'The "Uncanny"' (1919), of the aesthetic experience of something 'frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar'.⁸² Hamsun's works are crowded with doubles, repetitions and reduplications, setting in motion a long succession of ideal women, powerful patriarchs, and rootless outsiders in the later works. One senses the ominous workings of some demonic plot compulsion, always repeating itself in new ways. *Victoria*, the short novel for which Hamsun was accused of not knowing his 'fine ladies', circles around the same configuration – sex, class and laughter – but with a new twist, and another kind of laughter, at the point when the hero and poet, Johannes, learns that his loved one is dead: 'Naturally one doesn't get the woman one should have had', explains his eccentric old tutor, 'but if by some damned freak of justice or fair play it ever does happen', he goes on, 'then of course she dies immediately after'. Recurring patterns, it seems, generate a feverish intoxication with repetition as such: 'immediately after – *immediately* after, you see, ha-ha-ha, instantly. It's always the same story'.⁸³ The text of *Victoria*, let us note, does not simply name the recurring plot; it repeats it to the detriment of the 'fine lady', Victoria, who Hamsun consigns to writing a sentimental declaration of love, full of regret and self-reproach, on her death bed, complete with ellipses and breaks to bring home the torture of her slow expiration. Dagny and Edvarda too are made to pay the price in subsequent novels, as Dagny reappears in *Editor Lynge* (1893) as the embittered acquaintance of the editor, still mulling over the enigma of Nagel, and Edvarda reappears as a baroness and mother of two girls in *Rosa: From Student Pærlus' Papers* (1908), still carrying the burden of Glahn's fate. Thus would Hamsun impose his phallogocentric revenge, and thus, moreover, would the laughter that shakes phallogocentrism repeat itself. I shall conclude by qualifying this claim in two ways, first with regard to the logic of repetition as such, and secondly with regard to laughter as narrative effect.

The eerie feeling of repetition and return, first of all, has been felt and rejected by readers since the 1890s. 'As with Nagel in *Mysteries*', wrote Hans Aanrud in 1895, 'Lieutenant Glahn is no human but, rather, a heap of spiritual and physical movements . . . where no will, no intention, no purpose governs them, in other words, the features of someone mad.'⁸⁴ The assumption, here, is that 'realistic' human characters must not be 'mad', which is the kind of critical short-circuit the works of Hamsun and Freud undermine. Much like Freud's 'neurotics' (but also 'normal' people, as the psychoanalyst would have it), both Nagel and Glahn give the impression 'of being pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some "daemonic" power',⁸⁵ repeatedly afflicted by 'the idea of something fateful and inescapable when otherwise we should have spoken of chance'.⁸⁶ The reduplications across Hamsun's many novels, moreover, are uncanny not simply because they dramatize repetition, but because they repeat themselves, and thus repeat repetitions that split and multiply themselves unceasingly. As Nicholas Royle points out, Freud's own text, 'The "Uncanny"', unwittingly acts out the impossibility of treating uncanny repetitions as though they could be 'collated, classified, taxonomized', since 'one uncanny thing keeps leading on to another. Every attempt to isolate and analyse a specific case of the uncanny seems to generate an at least minor epidemic'.⁸⁷ In Atle Kittang's words, Hamsun "'repeats himself", persistently and systematically – not for lack of material, but out of the inner necessity of his existence as a writing human'.⁸⁸ This 'compulsion to repeat', for Kittang, transforms the writer's 'desire for dreaming' into 'an instrument of insight', whereby 'the incessant "reuse" of his own motifs, figures and symbols, gradually builds up a rhetorical machine [*ein retorisk maskin*], a "refraction machine" so to speak'. The resulting effect is oddly distancing, whereby the repeated motifs, figures and situations begin to '*slide away from themselves*'.⁸⁹ 'Hamsun's *writing*, the weave of his texts', says Kittang, acts 'as a motor and as a bearer of the modernist desire for insight' – an insight of a peculiar kind, however, emerging from the cumulative effect of reading Hamsun's books one after the other – repetition after repetition – as one fictional scene is tied to another while simultaneously dislocating it from itself 'so that the underlying pattern of structures and empty spaces come into sight, as a kind of radiography'.⁹⁰ Kittang tends to avoid the implications of his own insights, however, because he is too busy saving Hamsun from reductive readings that compulsively condemn his politics, and too concerned to build another kind of aesthetic 'totality' (*heilskap*) called 'modernism'. Kittang's argument orbits with uncanny precision, nonetheless, what is baffling in Hamsun's oeuvre, the endless repetitions that are never quite the same – that which Kittang evokes in his metaphors of the un-human (which are, nonetheless, strangely human): 'machine' (repetition); 'motor' (drive); 'radiography' (insight).

The involuntary and compulsive 'insight' of Hamsun's fictions do not lead to any 'understanding' in the classical sense of the word but, rather, to what the author himself called 'an involuntary understanding', and what Freud called 'the compulsion to repeat', the force of repetition, *repeating*. As Derrida clarifies in his remarkable reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, repetition is classically

defined as that which ‘comes after’ or ‘succeeds a first thing, an original’, whereby ‘repetition in general would be secondary and derivative’. The classical idea of repetition, then, entails a distinction between ‘the repeated and the repeating’, which is analogous to the distinction between ‘the narrated and the narrating’. Repetition, in this scenario, makes no sense unless it represents an original moment. As such, however, the classical concept makes foreign and other ‘what is repetitive or repeating in repetition’.⁹¹ In a different, ‘non-classical’ sense, says Derrida, repetition operates ‘according to a logic that is other’, where ‘repetition is “original”, and induces, through an unlimited propagation of itself, a general deconstruction’.⁹²

Reading the complex codifications of sex and class in *Mysteries* and *Pan* displays a dark, underlying structure that seems to drive the narratives towards their suicidal conclusions, as the masculine heroes turn in on themselves. They do so, however, via their reduplications in others, doppelgangers and doubles, keeping the circular logic spinning at the point when it surely should have ended, sending the reader back to the beginning, only to discover lines like these: ‘But this is not the beginning The beginning is as follows.’⁹³ The unhinging of closed ‘beginnings’ and ‘endings’ is, of course, a recognizable trope of literary modernism, from the last sentence of Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* sending the scrambled reader back to the first, to D. H. Lawrence’s more prosaic ‘In the beginning – there never was any beginning’.⁹⁴

The insight of *Mysteries* and *Pan* is that the double has no beginning or end, only endless knots and ruses: Nagel’s desire for Martha doubles Miniman’s desire for Martha; Nagel has a premonition in which he sees a ‘poorly dressed’ man who walks with ‘a slight stoop’ outside ‘a poor little one-story house without curtains’. At this point, in chapter eleven, Nagel has the ‘bizarre intuition’ that his name is Johannes,⁹⁵ whereupon – and following many other disorienting events – he is stunned to learn that Miniman’s real name is Johannes,⁹⁶ in other words, a near match to his own, Johan Nilsen Nagel, and, in other words once again, the name of *Victoria*’s hero. The house ‘without the curtains’ recalls Martha Gude’s house all the way back in chapter four. So, the inveterate reader conjectures, Miniman is the figure, Nagel’s ‘other ego’, prowling about Martha’s house, and wasn’t Nagel doing that anyway at another point? The text piles it on: soon after ‘a certain Nagel’ arrives, he is inquiring about ‘A certain Karlsen’, which turns out to be another story of love, jealousy, deceit and suicide. Karlsen has already been found dead before Nagel arrives, and the circumstances are suspicious, the hotel keeper explains, because ‘both arteries were severed’ and, also, because Miss Kielland’s pen knife was found at the scene.⁹⁷ *Mysteries*, to wit, ‘plants far too many leads for the eager analyst’, as Lorentzen remarks⁹⁸ – too many leads, we might specify, for anyone seeking linear causality or teleology. Karlsen commits suicide, one is led to suppose, on account of a doomed love affair with Miss Kielland, thus doubling Nagel’s suicide in advance; Nagel later suspects his ‘other ego’, Miniman, of murdering Karlsen. And what does this mean? That Nagel’s suicide is in some sense bound up – surely not! – with Miniman’s homicidal tendencies?

Suicide and homicide do, as it were, coincide in the final section of *Pan*, 'Glahn's Death: A Document from 1861'. The story of Glahn's end is told from the point of view of yet another double, an unnamed associate (Glahn's hunting partner in India) in whom Glahn rouses murderous jealousy on account of the latter's sexual exploits. Glahn, who only wishes to die, goads and directly provokes his narrating-double into shooting and killing him during a hunting trip; he contrives to kill himself by setting his double against himself in a knot of homi-suicidal vengeance.

The double remains where *Mysteries* and *Pan* converge and diverge; where proliferating repetitions repeat themselves; where causality, meaning and identity are swept up in the maelstrom of doubling; where *what* was done is held in suspense; where it becomes impossible to say with any certainty *who* did what, or to *whom*; whether the result was homicide or suicide; where it all begins or ends; or indeed, whether it really makes sense to say '*where*'. This recalls, or prefigures, Freud's reflections on 'The "Uncanny"', of 'doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self'; of 'the constant recurrence of the same thing'; of the double as an 'uncanny harbinger of death';⁹⁹ and, most astutely of all perhaps, what exasperates the psychoanalyst about E. T. A. Hoffmann's novel *The Devil's Elixir*:

Towards the end of the book the reader is told the facts, hitherto concealed from him, from which the action springs; with the result, not that he is enlightened, but that he falls into a state of complete bewilderment. The author has piled up too much material of the same kind. In consequence one's grasp of the story suffers, though not the impression it leaves.¹⁰⁰

Out of its ruin – out of its ruinous narrative structure binding commentary into endless backward loops – there is, however, an irresistible effect of comedy, or else of helpless laughter, that which Critchley calls the laughter of 'inability, inauthenticity, impotence and impossibility', and that which Hamsun (dis)locates in the double: 'now I am so confused that it's spooky; it's as if everything is loose inside me and can't stay still. Ha-ha-ha-ha!'

Chapter 4

Geographies of the Unhomelike: *In Wonderland* and the Rhetoric of National Rootedness

When a man is born at sea, is brought up in a Norwegian mountain village and has been on the move at home and abroad since the age of 14, how 'national' can he then be at the age of 30?

Letter to Edvard Brandes, Copenhagen 1888¹

[W]hen one has been away from one's homeland for a long time and returns home again . . . One understands all the words spoken, and all the looks one meets . . . And one sees again the soil one has sprung from . . . it is the bond of the blood.

'A Poet's Life', a lecture given in Finland, May 1899²

I feel at home here, being away from home, which is to say, in my element.

In Wonderland, at a Moscow restaurant, Autumn 1899³

Knut Hamsun's travelogue *In Wonderland* (*I Æventyrland*, 1903) re-plots the journey of its narrator and his 'travelling companion' (the author and his first wife, Bergljot) through 'Caucasia, the Orient, Persia, and Turkey' in the autumn of 1899.⁴ On the long downward slope of the Caucasus Mountains, they descend rapidly by horse and carriage from the chilly heights into a valley populated by Georgian peasants, amid homely dwellings 'one above the other up the mountainside':

By an immense chasm, we see on our left far, far on the wayside [*langt, langt avsides*], another valley where there are villages as here and huts and yellow patches of farmland up through the rocky slopes. Also there live humans, we think; they are just as happy as us, they too have their joys and sorrows, their work and rest. There is nothing, nothing in the world like being on the wayside [*avsides*] of everything! I go on thinking.⁵

The transient, shifting landscapes of *In Wonderland* are continually doubled by the personal associations of the narrating tourist, in this instance by a childhood

memory from Nordland in the north of Norway, of tending cattle as a young peasant lad ‘*derhjemme*’ (‘there-at-home’), of lying ‘on my back in the heather writing with my index finger across the sky’.⁶ This particular line has become a recurring motif in later biographical narratives of Hamsun’s life.⁷ The figure of the skywriting peasant boy, which Hamsun surrounds with descriptions of treading soggy pastures in wooden clogs while tending cows and billy goats amid the homely landscape of the far North, is attractive for biographers, no doubt, on account of its evocation of the romantic artist in infancy, bound to the national soil and destined for literary greatness. In the travelogue, however, it is a dream of romantic exile marked by strangeness: ‘Everything is so strange inside me, as though I could put down roots here and be blissfully shut off from the world.’⁸ The narrator feels ‘strange inside’ at the thought of being rooted to a foreign, yet homely, landscape. It is uncanny and strange, which is also to say, unhomelike – *Unheimlich* in Freud’s sense: the sight of the Caucasus valley, ‘the small yellow tilled patches, the flocks of sheep and the little huts’, is an uncanny double for the homely landscape *derhjemme*. The text thus bridges, by means of looks and associations, ‘an immense chasm’, across the valley to the Georgian village, and ‘home’ to Nordland; a bridge between different positions ‘on the wayside of everything’.

The gaze of this narrating tourist, travelling through ‘Caucasia, the Orient, Persia, and Turkey’ does not, therefore, inhabit in any straightforward sense the Western tradition Edward Said describes in *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978). Hamsun’s ironic mockery of Western perceptions of primitivism and barbarism throughout *In Wonderland* might even be seen, as Elisabeth Oxfeldt intimates, as an anticipation of Said’s critique of Orientalism.⁹ This becomes startlingly clear in the final leg of Hamsun and Bergljot’s journey to the capital of Turkey, Constantinople, published as a separate, shorter piece in 1903, entitled ‘Under the Crescent Moon’ (*Under Halvmånen*):

We have allowed ourselves to be told that the Sultan in his depravity sent inhuman agents down to a marketplace in Constantinople and purchased beauties for his harem. A fable worthy of Western fantasies: the West can do little else, yet it cavorts scholastically in this area!¹⁰

Hamsun’s ‘postcolonial’ sensibility *avant la lettre*, I shall argue in this chapter, proceeds from the unhomely marginality of the writer’s position. It is in relation to this, moreover, that I wish to situate the engaging modernism of his literary style – *alongside* its most troubling, political implications. This chapter explores two apparently separate scenes of writing, that of Hamsun’s two travelogues from 1903, and that of his growing prominence as a ‘national’ author in the wake of 1905, the year of Norwegian independence. I will maintain that both scenes of writing harbour the logic that underlies the author’s turn to fascism in the 1930s and 1940s, and that this is both counterintuitive and easily misread. We are talking not about ‘fascism’, but rather the complex

logic that later aligned itself with that historical movement; a logic that is often too close for comfort, so deeply is it implicated in the blinded compulsions of our own time, today in the twenty-first century.

The Rhetoric of National Origin

From the late-nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth, one could chart a history of nationalist recuperation in Norwegian literature – coming in the wake of the long Denmark–Norway union (1397–1814), and gathering pace throughout the Sweden–Norway union (1814–1905) – simply by tracing the publishing locations inscribed in successive editions of Hamsun's early works. The publishing locations of *Hunger*, for instance, never quite line up with the historical setting of Kristiania, beginning as they do in 'Copenhagen', followed by 'Kristiania and Copenhagen', and thereafter 'Oslo'. The 'Norwegianization' of place-names in the wake of 1905 was not immediate: Kristiania was not returned to its pre-union name, Oslo, before 1925, which also happens to be the year Hamsun's publisher, Norwegian Gyldendal, established itself as fully independent from its Danish counterpart. As Robert Ferguson points out, the partition of Gyldendal into separate independent companies in Denmark and Norway involved a recuperation of the national classics, as Norwegian Gyldendal purchased the sole rights to publish the collected works of Norway's 'Four Greats': Ibsen, Bjørnson, Lie and Kielland. The purchase of these rights, moreover, was greatly helped by a loan from Hamsun who, by then, was Norway's best selling and most translated author.¹¹ No longer the fierce young critic of the 'Four Greats', Hamsun was to become a major shareholder in Norway's largest publishing company and – in spite of his ongoing animosity towards Ibsen – a custodian of the national literary heritage.

Only after the turn of the century, and especially after 1905, did Hamsun begin to emerge as a 'national' figure. Prior to this, his reputation was that of an author with notable success abroad, especially in Germany and Russia; he was, furthermore, something of a foreigner himself, a 'Yankee charlatan' contaminated by a crude, commercialized culture seen as alien to Norwegian literature. Hamsun's own nationalist turn can be dated, very precisely, to the lecture he gave in Finland in 1899, shortly before setting off on the voyage to the Caucasus and Constantinople.¹² In a context marked by Finland's subordination to Tsarist Russia, Hamsun's sympathies lay squarely with his Finnish audience: it was the role of poets, he declared, 'to awaken and maintain the people's love for their fatherland'.¹³ The peaceful dissolution of the Sweden–Norway union in 1905 signals a more decisive shift in Hamsun's position, marked initially by the militant, nationalist poems he wrote before Sweden relinquished its authority over Norway, and later by his growing status as an heir to the Norwegian 'poetocracy' previously associated with Ibsen and Bjørnson. As such, Hamsun was called upon to speak for the nation's 'soul', and duly rose to the

task, delivering in 1908 a speech before the monument of Henrik Wergeland (1808–1845) during the national celebrations of the poet's centenary; and, on the death of Bjørnson in 1910, a panegyric poem alongside an obituary dotted with motifs from the national anthem (penned by Bjørnson in 1859 and officially adopted in 1864) and loving references to Bjørnson's Norwegian peasant tales.

The rhetoric of national origin is not limited, however, to such speeches and writings; it is also a dominant *code* which leads, as the postcolonial critic Rosemary Marangoly George puts it, 'to the interpretation of diverse phenomena through one glossary, thus erasing specificities, setting norms and limits, lopping off tangentials'.¹⁴ Since the inception of the Denmark–Norway union dating right back to the fourteenth century, and throughout the much briefer Sweden–Norway union of the nineteenth century, Norway's *written* language had followed Danish grammar and spelling. It should be recalled, here, that Swedish, Danish and Norwegian are mutually comprehensible; they are in fact much more similar than different, and this tends to make subtle, if not conceal altogether, the sense in which Norwegian literature in this period was 'unified', so to speak, by its desire to *differentiate* itself within Scandinavia. Wergeland, Ibsen and Bjørnson, the great 'national poets' of the nineteenth century, all followed Danish spelling and grammar, while embellishing their writings with so-called *Norvagismer* (Norwegianisms). Their books were published in Copenhagen and their works retain, to this day, a 'Danish' and 'bourgeois' tone; a sense relating to the fact that church and officialdom, along with the educated bourgeoisie, had followed Danish usage for centuries.¹⁵ Although both Ibsen and Bjørnson claimed to be writing *Norsk* (Norwegian), only on occasion allowing this to be called *Dansk-Norsk* (Dano-Norwegian), it is nevertheless 'Danish' words that wink back at the reader, at least when a 'Norwegian' reader of today turns to the original editions. As Sverre Lyngstad says in his textual notes to *Hunger*, *Mysteries* and *Pan*, the original edition of each one 'looks very much like Danish'. Now, if the Danish 'look' was merely a matter of *appearance*, does it not seem a little odd that Hamsun, in 1907, was retroactively 'Norwegianizing' the spelling and grammar as well as some of the vocabulary' in all his novels?¹⁶ Lyngstad's formulations suggest, in fact, that Hamsun was only returning the (Danish) 'originals' to their 'original' Norwegian. What, in fact, does this Norwegianization entail?

In practical terms, it meant the systematic retrofitting of so-called 'soft' Danish endings (*b-d-g*) with 'hard' Norwegian endings (*p-t-k*) along with other features of modernization (the replacement of capitals within sentences with lower case letters, the replacement of *aa* with *å*) and, as Ståle Dingstad has shown, the replacement of several 'Danish' words for 'Norwegian' equivalents whereby '*maaske*' is replaced by '*kanske*' (maybe), '*blot*' by '*bare*' (only), '*hinaanden*' by '*hverandre*' (each other) and so on.¹⁷ Both Dingstad and Lyngstad illuminate the textual variations in Hamsun's early works; yet they do not reflect upon the more fundamental logic of *domestication* that Norwegianization

entails – the codification of the national language by the slow and uneven erasure of its ‘foreign’ past. Let us recall, here, that *Hunger*, *Mysteries* and *Pan* all conclude on fairly decisive notes of *departure*, that is to say, by the movement of their heroes *away* from the national soil: the *Hunger*-hero departs Kristiania on a boat destined for Britain (Leeds) and Spain (Cádiz); Nagel departs the ‘small Norwegian coastal town’ of *Mysteries* by throwing himself into the sea; and Glahn departs the Nordland of *Pan* on what turns out to be a suicidal hunting trip to India. *Hunger*’s note of departure is the most ambiguous here, not just because the hero avoids suicide, but because of the way he looks back, from the boat on fjord, saying ‘farewell for now to the city, to Kristiania, where the windows shone so brightly in every home’.¹⁸ Let us trace just one minute instance of the retro-fitting of ‘Norwegian’, from the original Copenhagen *Hunger* of 1890 to the Oslo *Hunger* of 1954. The hero is ‘wet with fatigue and fever’:

vaad af Feber og Mathed
våt av feber og mathet

He looks ‘in’ towards land and says ‘farewell’:

saa indad mod Land og sagte Farvel
*så ind mot land og sa farvel*¹⁹

Nothing has changed at the level of ‘content’ or even syntax, except for these orthographic traces and untranslatable murmurs, the code that sends the text, in spite of its wayward drift, back home.

A subtle and uneven process of erasure has taken place, in which Dano-Norwegian gradually brackets off its long, embedded history, as if to strike out the Danish inheritance thus: ~~Dano~~-Norwegian. The process of domestication, however, entails another problem, relating to the internal differences and heterogeneities that are now ring-fenced within ‘one’ nation-state.

Differences at Home

In Norway, the process of nation building involved a split between two different norms of grammar and vocabulary, which, in turn, produced a scission within the national literary movements. Arne Garborg, a leading advocate for *Landsmaal* (Country Language) as a literary form, used a grammar and vocabulary based on rural dialects, established by Ivar Aasen in the mid-nineteenth century. Coming with claims of national authenticity, it was argued that *Landsmaal* – unlike the ‘Danish’ usage of the city-bourgeoisie – was uncontaminated by ‘foreign’ elements and rooted in Old Norse. Hamsun, who relied on the dominant form, ~~Dano~~-Norwegian, found himself on the opposing side, which held that the dominant form should be retained and gradually

Norwegianized.²⁰ Despite this, and despite the fact that he must have consented to, and possibly contributed to, the detailed Norwegianization of his own novels, Hamsun's public arguments on the language question and literature were in deep conflict with the official language reforms that would deposit orthographic traces throughout future editions of his works.

His two articles, 'The Language of the Land' ('*Landets Sprog*', 1910) and 'The Language in Danger' ('*Sproget i Fare*', 1918) respectively, were responses to the official language reforms of 1907 and 1917. The reforms themselves sought to bring the ~~Dano~~-Norwegian closer to *Landsmaal*, and entailed changes that were not to Hamsun's liking. First, he was opposed to the very idea that *Landsmaal* was in any way an authentic expression of the dialects of Norway; secondly, he was also opposed to what he characterized as the technocratic philology dictating the 'Norwegianization' of the dominant norm. In the first article from 1910, then, his critique was directed at the normative system of *Landsmaal*:

I have as my mother tongue the two very different dialects of Lom-Vaagvær [Gudbrandsdalen, central Norway] and Saltværing [the north of Norway], and learnt in my youth the dialect of Valdres [central Norway] pretty well – I have never needed to go through the compounded fabrication of *Landsmaal* to Norwegianize my language. And neither do I think I want the norm to interfere with my dialects or with Old Norse before I make use of them.

There is no living cultural language in the world that does not absorb strength from the dialects. In Denmark too they add new blood from the dialects through the Jutlandish Movement. But they don't first sit down to invent and envision a norm for their dialects, a complete system of nonsense and muddle and lifelessness, before they use it. They ladle from the sources, directly.²¹

Here, as elsewhere in Hamsun's writings, the figures of 'life', 'blood' and 'source' resonate powerfully with later fascist conceptions of aesthetic value, as *authentic immediacy* and *natural hierarchy* are taken for granted and woven into a rhetoric of conservative elitism and anti-parliamentarism. *Landsmaal*, henceforth, becomes the 'lower' form that 'teems about on earth' with 'quantity, not quality'. The 'arbitrary majority of the Parliament', complains Hamsun, has now made the language of the mob equal to the ~~Dano~~-Norwegian norm, failing to see that the Norwegian language 'will by its nature ascend more and more, it will not be democratized, it will be ennobled'.²²

This process of *ennobling* is not necessarily a process of *purification*, however, since the 'mother tongue' is already described as split and heterogeneous. The 'life' of Norwegian writing, furthermore, involves two sets of inheritance, on the one hand, the different dialects figured as the 'new blood' and 'sources' for creative writers and, on the other hand, the language of 'culture'. The latter, Hamsun suggests (without naming it as 'Danish'), should not be viewed as 'foreign' in the first place, since Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754), the Norwegian

poet, wrote in his own 'homely language', a '*living* language spoken by Denmark into his ear and into his heart every day'.²³ Hamsun tries to retain a certain heterogeneity and free-play within the Norwegian language, and pursues this agenda, precisely, through the figures of 'life', 'blood' and 'source', since these are also mobilized to oppose what he sees as the constraints of 'system', 'norm' and 'fabrication'. His 1918 article, 'The Language in Danger', is in many ways a restatement of the same view, but moves more decisively towards a rhetoric of purification, since Hamsun now insists that the Norwegian language is *one* by virtue of its detachment from its foreign past:

We have one language in this land. . . . Now, it was so that Norway's language was more or less a poor language, it was to begin with Dano-German with Norwegianisms; but as time moved on it worked its way further and further up from this foreignness [*Utlendigheten*], it became more Norwegian every day and finally gave a genuine expression of the nation's life in World Literature.²⁴

That this was a radical break from Hamsun's own past, which nonetheless took a long time to resolve itself – if ever it did – becomes very clear if we recall a letter from 1888, from the time shortly after his 'return' from America, that is, when he avoided Norway (Kristiania) and settled in Denmark (Copenhagen). The letter was addressed to Edvard Brandes, the editor of the Danish daily *Politiken*, to whom Hamsun had sent an article on Robert Ingersoll, an American Republican. Brandes had evidently returned the article for corrections and, inadvertently, provoked an acute crisis in the young author. It was a crisis arising from the coercive absurdities of Scandinavian nationalisms, a situation in which a Danish editor returned an article to a Norwegian émigré, recently settled in Copenhagen after his sojourns to America, because the script contained 'too many foreign-sounding words' and 'un-Norwegian turns of phrase':

I have deliberately never striven to be Norwegian. And it isn't in my blood to do so. The 'Norwegian-ness' in the language of the Bjørnson faction offends me more than actual mistakes. I cannot help it.

I saw somewhere that the greatest poet is held to be he who is most nationalistic. If my memory is not mistaken, it was your brother who said it [Georg Brandes] – the man who quite simply taught me what little I can do. But here I am incapable of understanding. . . . It is a doctrine that really upsets all my ideas.²⁵

The figure of 'blood', here, is mobilized *against* nationalism itself and, by implication, against the 'back to the land' rhetoric Hamsun would later adopt (most notably in *Growth of the Soil* from 1917, after which the polemic

'The Language in Danger' followed in 1918). One senses, in the letter from 1888, a terrible pressure gathering around what is also an opening onto radical possibilities:

Do you think this un-national side of me might hinder me in my efforts to become a writer? . . . And are not *translations* of course as un-national as can be in the country for which the translation is made? . . . I have thought much about your brother's words; my blood opposed them.²⁶

Hamsun, then, wished to move beyond simplistic nation building and nationalist recuperation, but encountered an irreducible confusion of tongues. A strange and comical resonance here, can be found in James Joyce's *Finnigans Wake*:

You tollerday donsk? N. You tolkatiff scowegian? Nn. You spigotty anglease? Nnn. You phonio saxo? Nnnn. Clear all so!²⁷

The cascade of languages in the fractured geopoetics of literature cannot be recuperated by any national code. Hamsun, however, sought to inscribe his work within a national code, as we have seen, through the Norwegianization of his novels and his belief that this would result in 'genuine expression of the nation's life in World Literature'. It is impossible to dissociate this from the compulsions, repressions and exclusions of future fascist nationalisms. 'The Language in Danger' certainly testifies to this, but also to something deeply autobiographical, which is not reducible to 'fascism', because it is after all caught up within a more general logic of exclusion found in nationalisms everywhere:

So be it that [the Norwegian language] still had a small defect [*Skavank*; flaw, weakness] in its history; that came from being abroad during its youth. But the language came home again and the defect disappeared with time so that it cannot be seen anymore. The language is blossoming and thriving, and when it has become fully grown the defect will only be a memory.²⁸

The language, like Hamsun himself, is homeward bound – but troubled. There would be little interest in reading Hamsun today, if his work did not always strain against, rupture or exceed the very frame of his politics; the national code may erase the Danish inheritance, but it does not erase Hamsun's persistent themes and figures of displacement, splitting, doubling and border crossing. In what follows, we turn back to *In Wonderland* and 'Under the Crescent Moon', the travelogues that were inscribed in the borderland between the 1890s works, and things yet to come in the twentieth century.

Differences Abroad

A journey presupposes an itinerary with an origin and a destination, which, from the standpoint of a national code, would assume that it begins and ends at home.²⁹ *In Wonderland*, however, begins and ends away from home: 'We find ourselves in St. Petersburg at the beginning of September', the narrator says in the opening line, 'We come from Finland where we've been living for a year.'³⁰ They travel by train from St Petersburg to Moscow where, following a brief visit, they continue to Vladikavkaz in south-west Russia; from there they journey by horse and carriage across the Caucasus Mountains to Tiflis (the official Russian name, from 1845 to 1936, for Tbilisi, the capital of present-day Georgia); after which they travel by train to two other destinations which were also under Russian control at the time, first to Batumi on the Black Sea (today in Georgia), and then on to what at the time was the world's largest oilfield in Baku by the Caspian Sea (today the capital of Azerbaijan). Here, in a place portrayed by Hamsun as a holy site corrupted by Western industrial modernity, the journey takes a U-turn back to Batumi, at which point *In Wonderland* concludes, as the narrator looks from his hotel window onto the Black Sea: 'Tomorrow we travel again back to Baku and then towards the East. So we will soon be out of this country. But I will always long for this place. For I have drunk from the River Kura.'³¹ The anticipation of a journey further to the East – the 'Orient' – however, turns out to be sheer bluff, a species of Hamsunian humbug: 'Under the Crescent Moon' picks up the itinerary as the travelling couple near the West, at the great intersection of Asia and Europe, on the waterway of the Bosphorus, coming from the Black Sea and into the capital of the Ottoman Empire, Constantinople – or 'Stanbul' as this late nineteenth-century tourist sometimes prefers. Here, the movement through geographical space confines itself to different locales in and around Constantinople, and concludes on a polemical note: 'the behaviour of the Christian powers in the East makes hatred blaze up now and again'; a 'flaming beacon in the East that could bring what humanity has feared for centuries: a global inferno'.³² Here, then, is the Hamsunian solution:

Islam once carried a high and fine culture. With Constantinople as its capital in a Muhammadan Federation, the Civilisations of the West and the East could mix their sources [*kilder*] and maybe bring forth a new culture rushing with living currents [*levende strømme*]. There are fools who can't see the salvation of the world and the future of life except in railways and socialism and American roar; the new culture may still be that of the fools.³³

Hamsun's logic is precise and, I argue, fundamentally misconstrued in the otherwise instructive readings of Atle Kittang and Elisabeth Oxfeldt. Their 'misreading', to put it bluntly, consists in the substitution of one East/West

dichotomy with another. The 'geopoetic' totality of *In Wonderland*, argues Kittang, involves 'the attempt to build a *myth of the original way of life*', organized around 'an antithetical structure, an opposition between East and West, the Oriental and Occidental', which entails a 'roughly hewn cultural critique in the encounter with the "Americanized" Baku' where the Orient comes to embody 'an original, natural way of life' in which 'all deviations from this way of life are the product of Occidental impulses'.³⁴ His reading is strikingly accurate, but the problem, here, attaches itself to the empty abstractions of the 'West' and the 'Orient'. Oxfeldt, who is keen to challenge Kittang on a number of counts, only essentializes his abstract binary, by positing 'the Westerner' and 'the Easterner' as fully present identities. Hamsun, she points out, undermines 'Orientalist' expectations by means of an ironic awareness that Western notions 'do not pertain to the Easterner'. *In Wonderland* nonetheless 'portrays a Western man's epistemological struggle', says Oxfeldt, where Hamsun's irony 'ultimately reflects his desire for a basic difference and irreconcilability between the Easterner and the Westerner'.³⁵

These are strong readings – *too* 'strong', because they shoehorn Hamsun into an East/West dichotomy that only reproduces the grand binary that ought to be our target of critique. There is no move *beyond* binaries unless one permits the possibility of rupture, and no valid *critique* of binaries unless their specific logic is understood. The totalizing East/West dichotomy of the Hamsun-text speaks of several centres, and several margins. The 'centres', in the Hamsunian constellation, are the *metropolitan* centres of Europe, the traditional imperial powers of France and Britain, to which America, increasingly, is the industrial supplement; the 'margins' are the spaces through which the narrator travels – not the 'East' or the 'Orient', but rather, *the eastern margins 'on the wayside' of Europe* which are joined, through Hamsun's devices of recollection and doubling, to *the northern margin 'on the wayside' of Europe*. The Hamsunian binary is therefore counterintuitive, because it posits the margins of Europe above and in opposition to the Western metropolitan centres.

There is nothing deconstructive about this, but neither does it belong to any standard history of ideas. Hamsun finally envisages a grand coalition of margins led by a 'Muhammadan Federation' of the future. Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan could be joined, the tourist-polemicist says, in a sacred and noble cause, shared by millions upon millions: 'the eighty million Muhammadans governed by England, the forty million in China, the thirty million in Africa, and the forty million under Russian and Dutch governance' – all of which serves, in his rhetorical scheme, as a threat not to himself but to the 'fools' and 'millionaires' of Western modernity, 'railways and socialism and American roar'.³⁶

Reading Hamsun's polemic today can be both surprising and oddly disconcerting, and I shall return to the reasons for this towards the end of the present chapter. My initial point is simply that the logic of Hamsun's polemical drift results in a monumental *reduction* of the tensions that otherwise play more freely

around the tropes of the (un)homely. The counterintuitive logic of his polemical drift can be seen, already, in the description of St Petersburg, early in the first travelogue:

The River Neva cuts through [*gjennomhuller*; bores through] the city everywhere, and it is strangely mixed [*forunderlig blandet*]: grand Western European apartments teeming amid Byzantine domed buildings and enchanting mud houses. The weighty museums and art galleries stand where they stand, but the kiosks, the sheds, the unbelievable human dwellings stand proudly in the sun as well, occupying their own good space.³⁷

This is counterintuitive, precisely by the privilege given to tradition-bound ways of life. Here, it is European style apartments that ‘are teeming’ (*vrimler*), much like the mob, among Byzantine architecture and mud houses, and not the other way round. From the initial view of this ‘strangely mixed’ liquid city emerges, moreover, a challenge to institutional ideas of heritage and origin: the museums and galleries just ‘stand where they stand’, whereas mud houses are greeted with enthusiastic exclamations (‘enchanting’, ‘unbelievable’). This may still be a myth of origin, as Kittang says, but it also turns into a reflection on the unruly, shifting nature of imperial history, expanding and contracting from another centre, imperial Russia, symbolically anchored by static monuments:

There has been talk of moving the city to a drier location – one may just as well talk about moving Russia. There are things in St. Petersburg that cannot be lifted: the Winter Palace, the Peter and Paul Fortress, the Hermitage, the Church of the Resurrection, the Isaac Cathedral. St. Petersburg moves like Russia moves, expanding, growing larger, larger.³⁸

The narrative grasp of imperial Russia within the travelogue also grows ‘larger, larger’ – *though not from any centre*. It grows and accumulates, instead, through the transitory, sequential and finally incomplete circuit of the itinerary. This is why the dream of origin is not at one with itself. As our previous discussion of Hamsun’s many figures of origin (‘life’, ‘blood’, ‘source’, ‘home’) already indicates, the dream of ‘origin’ (as well as ‘destination’) is internally split and fragmented. The travelogue and its readers encounter here something far more deconstructive and troublesome, namely, what Kittang subordinates as textual overspill or excess, in a passing remark about ‘the many insignificant details Hamsun piles on top of each other throughout the travelogue’.³⁹

The Procession of Difference

In Wonderland originally appeared with the subtitle ‘Experienced and Dreamt in the Caucasus’, thus introducing ‘artistic licence’ into ‘documentation’.

Oxfeldt associates the 'epistemological struggle' of *In Wonderland* with the fictional strand, as Hamsun 'fantasises, projects and freely associates his way through what already in the title is described as a land of fiction'.⁴⁰ I would argue, however, that the flights of fancy are marked by a certain *ease* – precisely a 'flight' – which contrasts rather sharply with the 'documentary' mode that records all those 'insignificant details'. That these were evidently not altogether 'insignificant' to the obsessive note-taker, points us towards a much more troubling epistemological struggle. On the first leg of the journey, via Moscow to Vladikavkaz and the Caucasus Mountains, the narrator records an exceedingly long and detailed *procession of difference* – of different classes, ethnic groups and individuals, all of whom pass before the eyes of the narrator, and who are identified and described in a shifting, inconsistent and uneven manner: Slavs working the fields, Russians of noble rank or common occupations, Jews of Russian or Armenian origin, Circassian officers, 'strong and healthy peasant women' in colourful dress,⁴¹ Caucasian Tatars, Persians, nomadic Kirghiz, muzhiks (Russian peasants), Cossacks, Molokans and Arabs. Hamsun is trying to 'record', as it were, this 'world of difference'; an Asian space that is other to the dominant projection of 'the Other', that which Gayatri Spivak's *Other Asias* designates as the blind spot of postcolonial discourse theory, 'the old multi-ethnic imperial formations, Ottoman, Habsburg, Russian'.⁴² So, what is Hamsun up to, the marginal 'Westerner' from northern Europe, on his journey through that other margin, just beyond Eastern Europe, where the geographical borders can be so unstable, on the western and southern margins of Russia?

The obsessive note taker is embroiled in the problem of identification, that is, of identifying multi-ethnic others. His strategies are often of an 'ethnographic' sort, in so far as he describes physical appearances, recording (though not always) the colorations of skin, hair and eyes, adding to this the odd reflection on bone structure, but most often more elaborate descriptions of forms of dress, whether these are rustic sheepskins, different kinds of head-wear, or ingeniously crafted fabric with complex ornamentations and unfamiliar embellishments. Such ethnographic aspects often overlap (though not always) with identifications of class, as the narrator marks the differences between nobility, officers and the material conditions and occupations of various urban and rural groups, a set of classifications which are, once again, overlapped (though not always) with descriptions of religious practices, overlapped (though not always) by cultural facts he has 'read somewhere',⁴³ and overlapped yet again (and yet again not always), by the narrator's own memories, which are just as likely to recall his American migration years as his Norwegian childhood.

The procession of difference is woven together by the sequential movement of the train through the changing landscapes into the Steppe, punctuated by several stops at different stations, to which are added numerous narrative interludes or episodes, some of which remain isolated, and others which come back later, thus stitching the text together with overlapping storylines. Once the train reaches Vladikavkas, however, one has the distinct sense that a narrative *impasse*

has been reached – a saturation of difference, in fact – at which point the tourist's obsessive note-taking is thrown into relief, initially by the relative solitude of the horse-and-carriage journey up the Caucasus Mountains, and then, high up at the station of Kopi before the descent begins, by a whimsical piece of fiction, as the narrator rides away on horseback to a remote village where – pursuing the kind of ironic comedy one recognizes as distinctly Hamsunian – he accosts a Tatar shepherd in his home, initially with the notion of making 'scientific' discoveries, and then with the self-aggrandizing idea of sparking a 'Caucasian women's movement', an idea that occurs to him at the sight of the villager's 'harem', whereupon he scribbles a poem he envisages could be used as their national anthem. The comedy, which strikes at Western fantasies of the Other, ends as the narrator, now masculine hero on horseback, sends the harem 'a magnificently invigorating look' before he rides away.⁴⁴ From here on, the rest of the travelogue goes, as it were, at an easier, 'downhill' pace, not simply because the next leg of the journey leads down the other side of the mountains, but because the thematic and polemic strands are more resolved, more reductive. The only narrative strands that recur during the passage across the mountains, before they are dropped by the wayside, concern a Jewish officer whom the narrator encounters soon after the train departs Moscow; a wax stain that spoils his jacket the following night; and the motif of authority, initially associated with the sight of a Circassian officer. I shall return to the wax stain in the conclusion and discuss now the work of irony in relation to what I argue is a deeply conflicted appropriation of ethnocentric hierarchy, centring above all on the figure of the Jew.

The Jew

On the journey from Moscow, the narrator takes an instant dislike to the officer on account of his 'Jewish snoot'.⁴⁵ This anti-Semitic sentiment, however, is later thrown into doubt when the same officer appears on the other side of the Caucasus Mountains, in the village of Mleti, where he informs the narrator of his orders, from the Russian authorities, to arrest him forthwith. When the crestfallen narrator, wielding his identification papers, insists the officer must have confused him with someone else, the officer calmly retorts that the narrator is indeed the right person, and adds another piece of evidence: 'I photographed you on the train. That's what I always do when I shadow someone. So you see, I haven't got the wrong person.'⁴⁶ The relationship of identification, in other words, has been reversed, in so far as it is the travel writer who now finds *himself* coercively identified. When the officer hints that the traveller may wish to use bribery as a way out, saying 'we Russians aren't hard people', the narrator immediately interprets this as 'a Jewish gesture', and promptly concludes that the officer is 'no policeman', but 'a poor swindler who wanted to blackmail me'.⁴⁷ This self-satisfied prejudice, however, proves short lived, as the narrator anxiously questions his assumptions when the officer, as promised, reappears at

the next stop. Since bribery is not uncommon among Russian officials, he now conjectures, the gesture was 'perhaps the best mark of his being a police officer'.⁴⁸ The Jewish stereotype, in other words, becomes part of a self-ironic, internal drama. Buoying himself up like Nagel in *Mysteries*, he returns to his previous assumption: 'Him! Heh-heh, he was a swindler, a Jew attempting blackmail'.⁴⁹ Then, immediately thereafter, he is consumed by the idea that this 'almighty Russian Chief Detective had handcuffs in his pockets'.⁵⁰ The mini-drama reaches its climax at the next stop in Chilkany, when two soldiers and an officer of the gendarmes appear and provoke mortal dread: 'I would end my days in a Russian prison, be brought to St. Petersburg in chains, and buried alive in the Peter and Paul Fortress'.⁵¹ As things turn out, it is the Jewish officer who ends up being arrested and carted away. One might conclude from this that the narrative functions to prop up the narrator's previous, anti-Semitic 'suspicions'. And yet, this turn of events only provokes his unmitigated *sympathy* with his former pursuer; he does not conclude that he was right, after all, to suspect 'the Jew' – no, he is struck by the cool indifference of the innkeeper, in whose restaurant the arrest occurs: "But God help you man!" I shout. "You nod as if the whole thing was nothing at all. Didn't they just now arrest a human being? . . . If something like that happened to me I would have sunk into the ground" I said'.⁵²

The comic irony of the narrator's position does not undermine or overturn, in any decisive manner, the anti-Semitic stereotype as such. His identification *with* the officer as a 'human being' certainly displaces, but does not directly undermine or undo the stereotypical assumptions that govern his previous identifications *of* the officer, vacillating as these do between the idea that he must *either* be identified as a 'Jew' (and thus a 'swindler') *or else* as an 'officer' (and thus an 'almighty Russian Chief Detective'). As befits the world of Hamsunian geopolitics, the narrator's attention is immediately displaced from the anti-Semitic debacle, as he goes on to vent his spleen on a nearby Englishman who, throughout the whole scene, has been retaining a nonchalant air, 'like all travelling Englishmen, complacent, mute, indifferent to everybody'.⁵³

The storyline about the Jewish officer (who is never identified as a 'Jewish officer') brushes up against the narrative strand concerning authority, beginning with the narrator's identification of a high-ranking 'Circassian officer' (Sunni Muslim) as the train nears Vladikavkaz. Observing this figure on the platform of Armavir station in the Caucasus region, the Circassian officer's air of authority is established by descriptions of his elaborate, ornamented dress, and by the way he walks about on the platform, exchanging words with grateful locals, and curtly rejecting the 'whining' entreaties of two muzhiks, or Russian peasants. Lost in admiration, the narrator praises the virtues of supplication: 'It is a pleasure to obey. And the Russian people can still do it.'⁵⁴ Yet, once again, the mode of self-irony complicates matters, as the narrator tries to exert authority over his Molokan horse driver, Kornej, who repeatedly refuses to set off at the required hour. Kornej, it turns out, is taking his orders from the (Jewish) officer, who addresses the Molokan 'in his mother tongue', and with 'unmatched

authority' (*makeløs myndighet*), whereas the narrator's attempts at being firm – 'my simulated authority' (*min imiterte myndighet*) – prove useless.⁵⁵

The irony of the Hamsun-text is not 'deconstructive', because it reconstructs ethnocentric hierarchies just as assuredly as it inserts these into ironic dramas. Nor does the travelogue involve, as Oxfeldt has argued, a 'loss of identity' for this Western tourist in his encounter with the Other. Only in the encounter with the Englishman, who ignores him and '*gjorde mig til luft*', 'turned me into air', does the narrator feel the force of erasure.⁵⁶ But when the Persian and Turkish traders in the Asiatic quarter of Tiflis ignore him, he is gleefully satisfied to be misrecognized – as English: 'There was an unmatched and blessed indifference towards us "English."' ⁵⁷ The irony of the Hamsun-text *maintains* an identity under erasure. Irony, here, performs only a more general function of identity and difference. The assertion of national identity at stake in the Norwegianization of his novels is implicated in the same complex logic of erasure. At home, he is ~~Dano~~-Norwegian; on the eastern peripheries he is ~~Norwegian~~, a 'Western man' (mis)taken for English or French. Hamsun's position does not fall in line with the East/West dichotomy articulated in the traffic of perceptions between the metropolitan blocks and their margins; he articulates, instead, a certain alterity, at once self-assured and uneasy.

The Stain

On the train from Moscow, the tourist soon acquires a small stain: 'It turns out that the candle in our compartment had been dripping paraffin wax on my jacket all night . . . my appearance has been considerably spoiled . . . I am exceedingly multicoloured [*spraglet*].'⁵⁸ The exact word, '*spraglet*' – 'motley', 'multi-coloured', 'pied' or 'gaudy' – recurs twice in the procession of difference, and both times with regard to women whose ethnic identity remains somewhat unclear. At the station of Kolodyeshnaya, he sees 'women in multicoloured [*spraglet*] dress' selling grapes, with 'red-and-blue kerchiefs on their heads', and sheepskin sarafans on their bodies: 'They are strong and healthy peasant women, their faces are swarthy, with black hair and upturned noses. Their eyes are brown', and 'however much fur they wear, it doesn't keep them from walking barefoot. Their feet are beautiful'.⁵⁹ At the station of Rostov, in the middle of the night, he encounters in the darkness a group of nomads: 'How they had strayed to this place from the Steppes of the East I don't know; but I heard they were called Kirghiz. To my eyes they didn't look very different from Tatars.' His description of the encounter is at once hapless, sympathetic and eerie, underscoring the exchange of looks between the Western tourist and the subjects of his record:

I look at the dark-yellow, slightly slant-eyed people and nod to them; they nod back and smile. I give them some nickel coins and they are delighted about this and thank me. We are now two Europeans standing there looking at

them, and the other European can speak a little with them. Beautiful they are not by our conceptions, but their glances are childish and their hands extremely small and sort of helpless. The men are dressed in sheepskins . . . The women wear multicoloured [*spraglele*] cotton dresses . . .⁶⁰

The wax stain, in the meantime, proves impossible to remove. A Russian gentleman with pince-nez rubs it away for him, in a farcical scene where ten Russians gradually surround the narrator, as he himself chatters away in Norwegian, but the stain still reappears with the cooling air of the night, later on to remain as a 'thermometer' of the changing temperatures through the Caucasus Mountains, going 'white' in the cold.⁶¹

Was Hamsun a racist and an anti-Semite? Is that our question? The standard question avoids a more troubling question, which strikes at Hamsun as much as it strikes at the European tradition more generally: What is 'a Jew' according to this tradition? *In Wonderland* reproduces, as we have seen, the common stereotype of the Jew as a figure of deceit. This is indefensible; but if the matter were as simple as this, there would scarcely be any interest in reading. Hamsun's heroes and autobiographical narrators are, of course, themselves figures of deceit, marked as such, through their myriad inventions and self-deceptions. This tends, moreover, to implicate literary endeavour as such: the Dano-Norwegian verb *at Digte* means 'to invent', and is associated with 'poetry': *Digtning* (like the German *Dichtung*) – 'literature', in this sense, can be exalted as a higher truth and, in the same breath, denigrated as downright perjury. The figure of the Jew as a 'swindler' is not simply Hamsun's other, it is the other within himself. Yet there is more to the figure of the Jew, as a double of the narrating ego, in the passages on Armenian Jews in the text of *In Wonderland* where, in the procession of difference, they are regarded with a combination of admiration and disgust. A 'couple of the Jews are very handsome', says the narrator, describing their 'caftans of black satin', their 'belts studded with silver and gold'. The young boy who accompanies them, however, provokes disgust – he has 'the face of a gelding', is treated as 'a lady' and is, of course, a figure of castration. The text does not dwell on this, it just notes that 'these trading Jews between Russia and the Caucasus' are itinerant entrepreneurs: 'They carry goods from the big cities into the mountains; from there they convey the mountain people's fabrics and rugs back to the big cities'.⁶² Here, in the curious manner by which the text passes from one thing to another, from castration to migration, lies what is not simply an epistemological struggle, but a *constitutive tension* in the Hamsun-text. The Jew is more than a figure of deceit, he is a figure of migration and, in the biblical tradition with which Hamsun was intimately familiar, a figure of exodus, diaspora and nomadism; that which marks the tourist himself, literally, when the multicoloured stain leaves its enduring mark, shortly after the initial encounter with the Jewish officer. Probably less a conscious figuration than an accident of writing, the '*spraglele*' stain attaches itself only to those who are difficult to place or identify: nomads, women – and the narrator.

The Jew, who stops being ‘a Jew’ the moment he is a ‘Russian officer’, is a figure of authority, precisely what ‘Hamsun’ is not. Whenever a Hamsunian hero or narrator tries to inhabit a position of authority (from Nagel in *Mysteries* to August of the *Wayfarers* trilogy), it’s always imbued with ‘humbug’, and shown up as such. Øystein Rottem and Atle Kittang recognize in this a critical element, a ‘double consciousness’ or ‘disillusionment’. To this, however, we must add that ‘double consciousness’ and ‘disillusion’, in Hamsun, presuppose an ongoing investment in the illusion – the illusions of authority, order and grand binaries.

Conclusion

Hamsun’s travelogues actively construct ethnocentric hierarchies, generally to the detriment of Jews and Armenians, but sympathetic towards Persians and Turks. The latter are praised for their Islamic identity and stoic disapproval of the Western metropolitan centre, and one finds here a rather disconcerting correspondence with the stance Hamsun later took up on Germany’s behalf. This concerns only the consistent *logic* of Hamsun’s position at different points in history. In the traffic of perceptions – heated accusations and ambivalent silences – between the imperial centres and their marginalized rivals, Hamsun consistently defends subordinate ‘others’ *against* the dominant Western powers. Such was the logic of his position during the First World War, when he explicitly defended Germany’s ambitions to possess colonies (*Lebensraum*), against the vested interests of French and British imperialism; and also during the Second World War, when he again defended Germany’s expansionist violence, now orchestrated by the Nazi regime, against Britain and America. To this comes another, counterintuitive, turn: the figure of the Jew in Hamsun’s work does not, as we shall see in Chapter 6, acquire any greater significance in his later articles, quite the contrary: the ‘anti-Semitic’ strand is displaced by an overdetermined and deeply contradictory rhetoric against the imperialist and industrial centres. His anti-imperialist rhetoric was contradictory, quite simply, because it served only to justify the imperialist ambitions of Germany, and thereafter the Nazis.

The ‘anti-Western’ logic of his politics, which I argue is consistent with his subsequent alignment with German authoritarianism, is prefigured in a disconcerting manner in the tourist-narrator of 1903, because it is this same logic that underlies his purported admiration of Islam and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. But here one should proceed with care: nothing suggests Hamsun ever conflated Islam with fascism, and neither must such a conflation be justified today.⁶³ It concerns another configuration of authority and imperialism, and this is why it is so uncanny: Hamsun moves perilously close to an apologia for the Armenian massacres between 1894 and 1896, orchestrated by the Ottoman Turks under the leadership of the Sultan Abdul Hamid II.

'Under the Crescent Moon' discusses the Sultan and the Armenian massacres in some detail – all the time in *opposition* to the accusations of Oriental barbarism in the Western press. The Sultan Abdul Hamid II was known as the 'Great Assassin', something the narrating tourist wishes to question: 'Where the truth lies is not easy to know', he writes, 'perhaps because we have an almost unanimous European press . . . The other party which should also be heard is mute'.⁶⁴

While the newspapers of the West are in floods of tears over the misfortune of this people [the Armenians], it is not difficult to hear in the East that their fate is deserved; they are conspicuously and unanimously portrayed as a people made up of thugs.⁶⁵

This apparently disinterested observation is framed by a clear, ethnocentric bias: the 'Armenians' are described as 'the trading Jews of the East' who exploit ordinary Turks, while Europe, for its part, is lampooned on account of its Christian fear of the Islamic Turks. This never turns into an outright apologia for the Armenian massacres, but neither does it avoid the reductive violence of describing a multi-ethnic and multi-religious group of people under one stereotype which is, moreover, an anti-Semitic stereotype.

Our own era, too, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, is dominated by totalizing gestures in phrases like 'Islam and the West'.⁶⁶ One way of resisting such reductions, in literary studies as elsewhere, is to embark on the risky task of reading, in order to recall and reflect upon the movements of difference and duration within texts that cannot be reduced so quickly, and so violently. A critical resistance to reductive gestures is also important in relation to Hamsun's nationalism; the legacies of Norwegian nation building have come to frame Hamsun's works in ways quite inimical, I would argue, to the uncanny, unhomelike remnants scattered across his entire production (displacement, splitting, doubling, fragmentation, migration). It is important to underscore that the most notable agent in the nationalization of Hamsun's works was none other than Hamsun himself. His geopoetics are marked, again and again, by the fractured logic of the travelogues, situated historically by the marginality of a Norwegian identity within a multi-ethnic world of differences and grand binaries, yet also by those aspects of his literary preoccupations that continue to elude, or rub up against, every desire for a bounded origin, and for a geopolitical order marked by totalizing gestures. So, here's the trouble that remains: what is most valuable about Hamsun's work proceeds from the dislocated experience of migration; what is worst about its politics, even as it reacts against itself, proceeds only from the same dislocation. The stain won't come out in the wash.

Chapter 5

Double Monument: *Growth of the Soil* – After the Nobel Prize and Nazism

At the end . . . the glow, the warmth of [Growth of the Soil] seems to linger. We feel, as we feel with all great novels, that nothing is over.

Katharine Mansfield, 'A Norwegian Novel' (1920)¹

It's in the nature of the subject that one has to talk disjointedly about this man. And those who try otherwise . . . only prove their incomprehension.

Walter Benjamin, 'Fragment on Hamsun' (1927)²

What remains of a literary text in the wake of its historical association with the worst of political movements of the twentieth century? The question is posed by the very survival of *Growth of the Soil* (*Markens Grøde*, 1917), an unsentimental hymn to rural life with haunting depictions of birth, life and death, written by Knut Hamsun as a warning against industrial modernity, for which he received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1920 – quite specifically, 'for his monumental work *Growth of the Soil*'³ – and which, years later, was canonized by Nazism, celebrated by the likes of Joseph Goebbels and Alfred Rosenberg, and re-issued in special *Wehrmacht* editions for German soldiers during the Second World War. Republished in Norway in the *Collected Works* (*Samlede Verker*, 1954), only two years after Hamsun's death, the novel lives on in countless languages and translations across the world, and has continued to be re-issued in English in W. W. Worster's somewhat flawed translation since 1920, while most recently reappearing in Sverre Lyngstad's new translation of 2007 as part of the 'Penguin Classics' series.

Why does this novel linger? A chillingly prescient answer comes from Franz Stangl, *Kommandant* of the extermination camp in Treblinka in Poland from 1942 to 1943, who evaded capture until 1970, when he was imprisoned for life for co-responsibility in the murder of 900,000 men, women and children. Gitta Sereny's interview with Stangl, originally published in her study of Nazi crimes *Into that Darkness* (1974), tells of his gradual corruption by the coercive logic of the Nazi State. At its extreme point, in Treblinka, Stangl recalls the horror of extermination, of hundreds of people being driven into the gas chamber, in his

own words, 'naked, packed together, running, being driven with whips'; of the *Totenlager*, 'pits full of blue and black corpses' – 'a mass of rotting flesh'.⁴ His first experience of mass murder was 'awful', like 'Dante's *Inferno*', says Stangl, 'Dante come to life'.⁵ A different literary reference crops up, however, on the subject of the war's *aftermath*:

[Gitta Sereny:] *When the war was over, what did you want to do?*

[Franz Stangl:] All I could think of was Knut Hamsun's novel, *Growth of the Soil* (*Segen der Erde*). That was what I wanted: to start from the beginning; cleanly, quietly, only with my family which I loved around me.⁶

This is indeed the fiction at the heart of *Growth of the Soil*'s opening section when the solitary hero, Isak – 'with a red iron beard and little scars on face and hands, sites of old wounds' – seeks out a place to 'settle down' and build a 'home'.⁷ Stangl's words are disconcertingly reminiscent of the initial reception of the novel, in the aftermath of the First World War, when it was celebrated as a redemptive hymn to life. This is the basic idea, moreover, that served to rehabilitate Hamsun after the Second World War as, for instance, in Rolf Nyboe Nettum's chapter on Hamsun's life and works from the 6-volume *Norges Litteratur Historie* (1975). Hamsun was no brutal vitalist, insists Nettum, on the contrary:

In Hamsun's works there is a remainder – a large remainder – that will never fit any scheme. Anyone who reads a few pages of Hamsun will experience something else – something positive: a delight over the beauty of life's origins, a humility towards what grows and germinates, a tenderness for children and gentle souls.⁸

The same recuperative move recurs in Robert Ferguson's biography, albeit with a more forceful life/death dichotomy: 'Fascism is humourless and hates life', he asserts, whereas Hamsun's literary works always convey that 'simply to be alive is a wonderful thing'.⁹ For Ferguson, the 'enigma' of Hamsun proceeds essentially from what he sees as the *impossibility* of Hamsun as a fascist, of life as death. It is through this set of oppositions then, that Hamsun's survival, the survival of his works, is habitually affirmed: as life *against* death and life *against* fascism rather than – and this is the sense I want to explore in this chapter – a haunting survival *after* death; *after* fascism.

Hamsun's later works, indeed, keep affirming 'life', 'growth' and 'regeneration' – but do so in ways that lend themselves to an array of divergent political agendas, while lingering on today, perhaps, because there is no ideological closure for the murkier aspects of Hamsun's figurations of 'soil' and 'growth'. This chapter develops new ways of thinking about the troubling legacies of *Growth of the Soil*, initially, by retrieving aspects of the contextual background of

the novel alongside the international history of reception, and thereupon, in the second half of the chapter, by tracing the complex figurations of growth in the literary text. I wish to reflect upon the multiple aftermaths of this novel, in order to address certain legacies that remain *before* the literary text, *before* reading, and *before* literary criticism.

Transplantations

Isak, ‘a tree-stump with hands’,¹⁰ is a figure of rootedness unlike any other in Hamsun’s oeuvre; his obscure background – ‘perhaps an emigrant from the villages’¹¹ – suspends the Hamsunian obsession with wandering, movement and migration, and serves to make possible his new beginning as a *bonde* (peasant) in the Old Norse sense of the word – ‘*búandi*’ or ‘*bóndi*’ – a ‘place-bound resident’. Though Isak is rooted to the land, the same is not true of the literary text, which, in a structure of *transplantation*, is always capable of breaking with any context of production and reception. Leo Löwenthal’s ideology critique demonstrates this, even though his argument insists on rooting Hamsun to a single formation, ‘the political resignation and the ideological seduction of broad social strata in contemporary Europe’.¹² For Löwenthal, Hamsun and his ‘bourgeois strata of readers’ are seduced by a deceptive dream in which the ‘individual is stripped of his singular human qualities and subjected to “eternal” naturalness’.¹³ Attuned to ‘forces stronger than himself’, the peasant of *Growth of the Soil* is an ahistorical glorification of ‘subjection and discipline’: ‘Hamsun’s emphasis is not on the social conditions of the farm’, maintains Löwenthal, but on ‘the myth which demands the necessity of man’s submission to nature’.¹⁴

Löwenthal’s critique is powerful, but also powerfully reductive, insofar as he never reads the *tensions* within Hamsun’s works, actively refuses to read the *differences* that emerge in the international reception history and, moreover, privileges social history in a way that carefully ignores *historical diversity*.

Though *Growth of the Soil* contains no dates, the arrival of the telegraph line and the currency transition from *daler* to *kroner*, situate the historical period as mid to late nineteenth-century rural Norway.¹⁵ From beginning to end, Isak clears new grounds, sows and harvests, tends his animals, fishes in the nearby lakes and fells timber in the forest, not purely for the household, but also for exchange and goods in the village located many miles away, by the coast on the other side of the valley, which is itself many sea-miles away from the urban centre of Trondheim in the north of Norway. It is thus a location removed from ‘civilization’ – but not ahistorical: farms in late nineteenth-century Norway were often remote, and the dominance of seasonal cycles, here, is not necessarily extolling blind subjection, so much as the ‘organic’ tradition of knowledge that Hamsun retrieves and celebrates. The Norwegian intellectual tradition, Nina Witozsek suggests, retained in the nineteenth century an altogether more practical view of the landscape; being mired in it, they were less given to the sublime transportations of European romanticism.¹⁶ Indeed, the Norwegian critic

Carl Nærup praised *Growth of the Soil* in 1917 precisely because there was 'no romanticism in the book, no dreams, no fanciful, flighty, wayward or sentimental feeling'; it was, on the contrary, 'full of reality and experience'.¹⁷

Traditional farming practices, at this time, did not belong to the distant past, and industrialization in early twentieth-century Norway was slow and uneven, limited to relatively isolated pockets across a sparsely populated country separated by long distances and mountainous terrain. This, along with a history of economic and political subordination to Denmark and Sweden, gave the 'Norwegian peasant' exceptional historical status, according to Friedrich Engels: 'The Norwegian peasant was *never* a serf'; 'the Norwegian petty bourgeois is the son of a free peasant'.¹⁸ Since the mid-fifteenth century, Norwegian peasants were increasingly allowed to purchase the land they had previously rented and, by the mid-nineteenth century, were predominantly freeholders in control of their own means of production. As a political signifier, the *bonde* retained a privileged position in Norway, used by various political and artistic groupings, often on the radical left, as an enduring icon of egalitarianism, democracy and justice.¹⁹ In this context, *Growth of the Soil* entails no ideology of 'submission'; on the contrary, it re-inscribes a tradition of liberal independence in the figure of the self-sufficient peasant, whose farm is eventually named '*Sellanraa*': a compound of '*selv*' (self) and '*rå*' (rule); 'self-rule' which, of course, recalls the rallying cry of Norwegian peasants: '*selvråderetten*' (the right to self-rule).

These historical 'grounds', however, are not explicated within the novel as such, and neither would they easily travel once the text is translated, transferred and transplanted. One finds, therefore, a general contrast between the Norwegian context of reception and that of the European metropolitan centres. Walter Benjamin, for example, says that Hamsun confronts 'us' modern readers with the '*Fremdheit*', the 'foreignness', of the peasant:

If we consider this foreignness and put it before our eyes, of how long generations of peasants remained silent, then Hamsun stands before us: the toothless mouth of the hitherto ignored peasant generations now begins to open itself and to slowly speak its word about our life. Hamsun's language bridges this gap of incomprehension like no other.²⁰

Benjamin's figures are striking, and self-consciously Hamsunian: toothless mouths and oral gaps that speak across time and generations. In a different way, Franz Kafka was also preoccupied with Hamsun's figuration of modernity as a schism breaching roots with the past, likening himself to the lost son of *Growth of the Soil*, Eleseus: 'And in fact such has been my growth, like a shoot forced too soon and forgotten', writes Kafka in his diary of 1919, 'Like Eleseus and his spring trips to the cities'. That character was 'not to be underestimated', however: 'Eleseus could have become the hero of the book, and in Hamsun's youth such would probably have been the case.'²¹

Eleseus is one of the figures in whom the schisms of modernity are compounded; he is the child who the local entrepreneur, Geissler, notices playing

with copper-stones, and who thus inadvertently sets in motion the long march of industrial development; who later leaves for the city to work as a clerk; who returns to take over a failed trading post; who lusts impossibly after an already attached woman; and who, in the end, emigrates to America, as a figure of exodus – and loss. In *Hunger*, he would be the hero; in *Growth of the Soil*, however, he is a figure of pity – ‘almost nothing’:

He probably should have been a settler from day one, now he is someone who has learned to write the letters of the alphabet; he is without initiative, without depth. [...] Perhaps the good district engineer from the city shouldn't have discovered him as a child and taken him into his house to make something of him; the boy probably got his roots torn and fared badly.²²

Quite against his own vocation as a writer, then, Hamsun denigrates the written word, in order to re-inscribe the kind of idea Jacques Derrida associates with ‘the age of Rousseau’ in *Of Grammatology*: the idealization of pre-literate cultures as natural, innocent and peaceful, untouched by ‘the violence of the letter’; the supposed scission of *writing* as such, the break which henceforth cannot be written without already being broken – by writing.²³

To the inscriptions of writing come the re-inscriptions of translation. Thus, when Isak reclaims the ‘*herreløse land*’ (lit. ‘lordless land’), the English translations render this as ‘no-man’s-land’ which, in the context of 1920s Europe, becomes an uncanny namesake of the battlefields of the Great War. It was in the wake of this war that H. G. Wells, in his post-apocalyptic projection, *The Salvaging of Civilisation*, declared that only Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* and Hamsun’s *Growth of the Soil* ‘come nearest to the idea of a universally inspiring and illuminating literature’.²⁴ The trauma of the First World War reverberates throughout the initial European reception of *Growth of the Soil*, not least in Germany, as the Swiss literary critic Walter Baumgartner points out. Anticipating its German translation in 1918, the literary magazine *Weser-Zeitung* proclaimed that Hamsun had become ‘the prophet of homely soil. Be strong! is his demand. Grab the spade in your peasant hands and wrest from the soil its hidden treasures. You are Germanic peoples!’.²⁵ In *Kunstwart*, an organ of the *Heimat* movement, the novel was greeted as ‘arriving at the right moment’:

For the people probably forgot during all these years, when their brains were all befogged by gunpowder smoke and screams piercing the air, forgot the best thing. They forgot that there is land out there, young soil, covered by marsh; it can be drained, one can sow, one can also have a goat in the hutch, build a hut, harvest during autumn, fell timber during winter. [...] All of this one can do, if one is as strong as the settler Isak and uncontaminated by the confused spirit of Europe.²⁶

Baumgartner rightly cites these reviews as manifestations of nation and race, or blood and soil ideology, yet it should be recalled that the appeal of *Growth of the*

Soil crossed into other regions, as is indicated by the award of the Nobel Prize. The Chairman of the Swedish Nobel committee, Harald Hjärne, also celebrated the novel as a timely 'monument' against the backdrop of the First World War, but did so in an idiom of international solidarity and reconciliation, declaring it an 'epic of labour' which 'mollifies and brings together divided spirits'.²⁷

Growth of the Soil makes no ethnocentric gesture on behalf of 'Germanic peoples'; it makes an appeal, rather, to cherished biblical motifs, where earthly growth stands for 'genesis', corruptions of modernity for 'the fall of man', and the simple pleasures of rustic existence as 'paradise lost'. Looking at his father's farm, Isak's other son, Sivert, is overcome by a 'primeval impression': 'It's almost as if he stands there looking at the Garden of Eden, he thought.'²⁸ In the grand closing lines of Chapter III, Isak sows grain, walking 'bareheaded in Jesus' name':

See, the seeds will sprout and turn into ears and more grain, so it is all over the earth when grain is sown. In Palestine [*Jødeland*; lit. 'the land of the Jews'], in America, in the Gudbrandsdal Valley – oh how wide the world is, and the tiny little square on which Isak went sowing, it was in the middle of it all.²⁹

The sheer generality of its appeal probably owed something to the Romantic idea of the peasant, uncontaminated by urbanization and industrialization, which lived on through the late 1800s and early 1900s in, for example, Henry George's campaign for equitable land distribution in America, Tolstoy's return to the moral life of the Russian peasant, and Ebenezer Howard's plans for 'Garden Cities' in Britain.³⁰ As *The Times Literary Supplement* put it in 1920, *Growth of the Soil* 'is a book to be read at the present time when, in our feverish desire for the increased production of dead things, the mystical poetry of the growth of living things has been forgotten'.³¹ For the American critic, Josef Wiehr, Hamsun's 'monumental epic' bore 'not the slightest resemblance to tales from our own frontier days': the 'American pioneer was a capitalist' whereas Isak is 'the humble, but able, courageous and untiring man who goes out into the wilderness and wrests a living from stern but bountiful nature'.³² Moving further to the political left, Thomas Mann wrote in his diary, on 12 April 1919, that *Growth of the Soil* was 'in profound contact with all the present yearnings' – 'glorification of the solitary farmer, of rustic self-sufficiency; hatred of the city, industry, commerce'. This is 'completely apolitical', writes Mann, who nonetheless suggests the novel may be 'communism poetically perceived, or better: humanely poeticized anarchism'.³³ It is often forgotten, today, how far this humanist reading of *Growth of the Soil* stood opposed to the ideologues that later appropriated it. Thus, in her 1922 study of Hamsun's works, Hanna Astrup Larsen writes:

In an age which has been saddened by the pernicious doctrine of competition, the survival of the fittest, and the slogans of false Darwinism, he preached the gospel of friendliness. We have been told that nature is cruel; Hamsun says that nature is friendly and beneficent.³⁴

Growth of the Soil was thus mobilized against the 'false Darwinism' later attributed to the novel, here in Alfred Rosenberg's Nazi tract, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, which popularized the notion of history as a perennial struggle between the glorious Nordic spirit and the corrupting influence of 'inferior' races:

Isak follows an inexplicable law. He carries on a fruitful quest out of a mystical primal will. [. . .] *Growth of the Soil* is the great present day epic of the Nordic will in its eternal primordial form. Nordic man can be heroic even behind the wooden plough. Every stirring in his muscle bears fruit.³⁵

Löwenthal certainly had a point – the Hamsun-text and the Hamsun-reception, he intimates, mirror one another in a structure of mutual confirmation: 'those stratas who applaud him', he says, 'find their own ideology'.³⁶ To call readers 'stratas', however, is to foreclose the possibility of difference and to deny, indeed, the possibility of reading differently. For Löwenthal, there is no difference to be established, for example, between the Hamsun-text and Rosenberg's profusion of Nazi clichés ('mystical primal will', 'Nordic spirit' and so on). Thus reduced, the novel can only stand as a monumental *lie*, to oppose any claims of monumental *truth* – yet, either way, it remains *monumental*, which is to say, unified, solid, static and unbreakable.

There are, however, serious differences in the international transplantations of *Growth of the Soil*; sometimes, as we have seen, the interpretations are mutually exclusive, ranging from a Hamsunism of the left to a Hamsunism of the right. 'How can one avoid taking all this into account when reading these texts?' asks Derrida in a related context: 'One reads only by taking into account.'³⁷ Derrida discusses, in *The Ear of the Other*, the problematic of sameness and otherness in 'the Nazi orchestration of the Nietzsche-reference'. What remains to be explained is how the 'reactive degeneration' of Nazism was able to 'exploit the same language, the same words, the same utterances, the same rallying cries as the active forces to which it stands opposed'.³⁸ Rejecting any hasty claim of a 'so-called perversion of the text' – a common manoeuvre used to side-step uncanny resemblances – Derrida calls attention to the aporia of *doubling*, of double interpretation and the doubling of the same: 'The one can always be the other, the double of the other.'³⁹ In what follows, then, I wish to reflect more closely upon how, as Derrida puts it, the extraction and reconstitution of 'certain short sequences' allow one to 'clearly see that what passes elsewhere for the "same" utterance says exactly the opposite and corresponds instead to the inverse, to the reactive inversion of the very thing it mimes'.⁴⁰

Recycling

On what grounds can a Nazi appropriation of the text rest? And to what extent is the novel complicit with the different ideologies attributed to it? The idea of

'growth' has specific implications in the Nazi idiom, as is illustrated in the writings of Richard-Walther Darré, who was in charge of the Third Reich's agricultural policy. In a garden left to its own devices, writes Darré in *A New Aristocracy Based on Blood and Soil* (1930), 'overgrown by weeds' and where 'even the basic character of the plants has changed' the gardener's role is to keep 'harmful influences away', to 'ruthlessly eliminate the weeds which would deprive the better plants of nutrition, air, light and sun'. In this rhetoric, 'growth' is a figure of racial hygiene, of 'breeding' and 'blood consciousness' carried forth by modern eugenics.⁴¹ Does *Growth of the Soil* fit the idiom? Its chronicle of 'growth' can, indeed, take on a racist cast, insofar as the expansion of Isak's farm – mid-way through the novel – entails the expulsion of 'inferior' others.

The portrayal of 'Lapps' – the anachronistic term for the *Sami* people of 'Lapland' – is fairly tendentious in this respect, because they are represented as primitive nomads and figures of dark superstition who wither away as the settler society ascends: 'The Lapps keep to the fringes, lurking in the dark', the narration asserts in Part Two, Chapter IV; 'expose them to light and air and they don't thrive, like vermin and worms'.⁴² These similes are indefensibly racist, and yet they harbour a double edge, since 'worms' are of the soil, and also because this sentence – or death sentence – is made at a juncture when the settler society is being invaded by the corruptions of modernity, that which threatens to alienate farmers from their land. In the first part of *Growth of the Soil*, the Lapps form an integral part of the wilderness; their departure, in turn, marks a transformation in the landscape, moving away from the earthy myth of origin in the opening sections of the novel. The ambivalences of Hamsun's works are often complex, and yet the stereotype of 'Lapps' as thieving parasites, which falls in line with a long history of representation in Scandinavia, is only reinforced in this text. The *Sami* people, traditionally resident across the vast cross-border region (the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula of Russia), are historically marginalized, excluded or integrated to comply with the borders drawn by nation-states. In this context, *Growth of the Soil* mirrors the ethnocentric rhetoric that belongs to nationalism in general, such as the violent erasure of Jews in Nazi Germany, the ongoing violence towards Third World immigrants entering the West, or indeed the deadly rhetoric of mutual exclusion between Israel and Palestine.

The German title of the novel, *Segen der Erde*, suggests an expansionist, imperialist direction: 'Segen' refers to the 'blessing' and the 'benefit' of 'der Erde' – which is not just 'soil' or 'earth', but also, 'the Earth'; 'the Globe'. The Norwegian title, *Markens Grøde* ('the fruits of the field') holds no such connotation, although Isak's founding act does consist in claiming a piece of land, after which he is described, affectionately, as 'the Margrave' ('markgræven'), thus leaving the door open for his association with the Germanic 'markgrave' which originally referred to noblemen of the Middle Ages governing frontier provinces. As Jost Hermand points out in his study of German 'Volkish Utopias' before and during the Second World War, the popular image of the frontier peasant involved a

double bind, expressing both 'sincere yearnings for a more healthy, rural, and natural lifestyle' and 'imperialist inclinations that used such "back to the land" ideas merely as ideological window dressing for the more serious business of an expansionist "Eastern policy"'.⁴³ *Growth of the Soil*, thus, found its resonance with expansionist nationalism in Germany – yet also had its readers among Jewish settlers in Palestine before and after the Second World War, via the novel's Hebrew translation.⁴⁴

The biblical appeal of the novel is certainly strong, and is systematically ignored, of course, in the glorification of 'Nordic will' in the Nazi appropriation. Alfred Rosenberg was thus conspicuously silent about the hero's biblical name, the 'Judeo-Christian' figure of Isak, or Isaac of the Old Testament. Rosenberg's ideal of the Greek-Nordic Aryan – a 'tall, lean figure with shining eyes, high forehead, muscular but not muscle bound'⁴⁵ – is hardly mirrored in the figure of Isak, who is a curious compound of Norwegian folklore and biblical imagery, at once a hero and a comical sight:

Isak is sowing, a water troll to look at, a stump . . . He walks religiously as he sows; his crown is bald, but otherwise outrageously hairy, with a wheel of hair and beard standing out from his head. This is Isak, the margrave.⁴⁶

Isak is certainly no Greek-Nordic Aryan; and yet, it is in the novel's use of biblical names that the possibility of an anti-Semitic strand comes back, in the form of a greedy tradesman named Aaron, apparently reinforcing the common stereotype.

Setting up a trading centre to exploit the influx of workers as mines are being established in the nearby mountains, Aaron is described as 'raking in money'.⁴⁷ Except by the association of the name, the tradesman is never explicitly designated as 'Jewish' and the details of his background, provided through local gossip, concern only his great wealth: 'He is from down the coast . . . He paid cash when he signed the deed. That's all I heard. He must've made big money fishing, they said.'⁴⁸ In contrast to the self-sufficient settlers, Aaron does not cultivate the soil but builds instead a new road for deliveries, which is 'nothing like Isak's first narrow path up through the common'.⁴⁹ Amid such juxtapositions, which reinforce the novel's general rhetoric against entrepreneurial capitalism, there is a curious moment when the text calls attention, precisely, to his name:

He wasn't called Aaron, incidentally, that was only his baptismal name, his name was Aaronsen, so he called himself and so his wife called him; the family was arrogant and had two maidservants and a hired man.⁵⁰

Thus, while apparently setting up an anti-Semitic stereotype which ridicules the social standing of the tradesman, as the confusion of names (Aaron or Aaronsen, or Aaron Aaronsen) makes him excessively 'Jewish' by name, the

text nonetheless throws doubt over his status by its reference to 'his baptismal name', or his 'Christian name' as Worster's old translation would have it.⁵¹ Here, it is perhaps not the text that perpetuates ethnocentric stereotypes, so much as the strategies of reading that base their value judgements on essentialist designations of ethnic identity – be they 'critical' or not.

The word *Jøde* (Jew) appears only twice in this novel, and illustrates in both instances the double ambivalence attached to Jews in the works of Hamsun, as figures of *exodus* on the one hand and of *deceit* on the other, while in both senses, refracting constitutive tensions within the Hamsun-text. In the grand lines that close Chapter III, Isak's plot of land stands 'in the middle' of a geopolitical constellation – *Jødeland* ('the land of the Jews', or Canaan), 'the Gudbrandsdal Valley' of Norway, and 'America' – which might be read as an autobiographical inscription, insofar as *Jødeland* is evoked in the biblical sense Hamsun knew from childhood. As the Promised Land to which the Diaspora would return, *Jødeland* inflects 'Gudbrandsdal' (his birthplace) as the site of origin, and 'America' as the site of uprooted migration. *Growth of the Soil*, indeed, enacts the myth of return to its own *Jødeland*; towards the end of the novel, however, both 'Jews' and 'America' attain the other signification, when the former bailiff and failed entrepreneur, Geissler, laments the decline of the times: 'My son is the type of our time, believing sincerely in what the time has taught him, in what the Jew and Yankee have taught him; I shake my head at it.'⁵² '*Jødeland*' and 'America' are thus metaphors of promised return and unity at the beginning of *Growth of the Soil*, but ciphers of capitalist corruption at the end.

Much of the novel's received 'ideology' – including that of 'peaceful' co-existence with nature – is directly articulated, indeed preached, by Geissler, the novel's 'chief ideologue', who is nonetheless equipped with all the vices this character deplores in 'the Jew and the Yankee'. As Øystein Rottem argues, Geissler's position and, by extension, that of Hamsun, entails a 'double consciousness' that calls into question the very grounds upon which the utopian vision of the novel rests.⁵³ Like the writer of utopia, submitting his writings to the capitalist sphere of exchange, Geissler too expounds the virtues of the soil, yet knows he is 'a man who knows what's right but doesn't do it'.⁵⁴ Arriving unannounced at various points through the novel, to assist Isak in legal, financial and practical matters, Geissler is regarded with awe, wonderment and affectionate derision. Whether fired from his post as bailiff, gambling away his money on risky investments, or passing through wearing frayed clothes, Geissler always keeps himself 'erect as though he had several hundred *daler* in his pockets'.⁵⁵ His motives are obscure, or else imbued with the humbug of a failing entrepreneur, as he encourages the development of mines one moment, and cuts off support the next. Covering over a financial misjudgement, he tells Isak that the temporary closure of the mines will 'force people to till the soil'; 'Now I'm the one who rules!'⁵⁶ Geissler is often taken as Hamsun's mouthpiece which tends to ignore, however, that this fictional character is always in the jaws of

another mouth, Hamsun's narration: Geissler 'didn't look as though he ruled over much when he left, carrying a small food pack in his hand and wearing a vest that was no longer pure white'.⁵⁷ At the end of the novel, the washed-up failure continues to preach the virtues of the soil: 'Man and nature do not bombard each other, they are agreed', he declares to Sivert, the peasant lad of whom he is barely conscious: 'Geissler doesn't seem interested in the answer, or perhaps did hear it, and he continues . . .'

Listen to me, Sivert: Be contented! You have everything to live on, everything to live for, everything to believe in; you're born and you bring forth, you are vital to the earth. Not everybody is, but you are: vital to the earth. You sustain life. You go from generation to generation, fulfilling yourselves; when you die the next brood takes over. This is what is meant by eternal life.⁵⁸

It is only too easy to recycle this, as indeed occurs in an American Neo-Nazi magazine, *National Vanguard*, to bolster Nazi doctrines of racial breeding. Here, celebrating the author as an 'Aryan Nationalist', an unrelenting anti-Semite and staunch supporter of National Socialism, it is claimed that *Growth of the Soil* 'reflected Hamsun's belief' that 'Western man' 'was intimately bound up with Nature's eternal law' and 'the need to place the procreation of the race back at the centre of his existence'.⁵⁹

This image of Hamsun is usually the target of condemnation; now, however, one finds the same portrayal recycled for the purposes of white supremacist self-deification. Isn't this, however, just the same old story – of reactive condemnation, as it were, running into its obnoxious enemy, who only reduplicates the same reductive interpretation? What both have in common, to be sure, is not vile racism, which is rightly condemned, but rather an underlying assumption that the literary discourse of Hamsun, which is split and ambivalent, can be reduced to univocal ideological doctrines. Equating *Growth of the Soil* with 'blood and soil' confirms only the opportunistic and inconsistent logic of Nazi stereotyping.⁶⁰ As Homi Bhabha says of colonial stereotypes, 'at other times and places, the same stereotype may be read in a contradictory way or, indeed, be misread'.⁶¹

One wonders, perhaps, how any procedure of literary interpretation could possibly take account of such trouble, beyond the possibility of demonstrating, *ad nauseum*, whether or not certain stereotypes, attitudes and ideologies are upheld or undermined (or both) by the literary text. For the progenitors of comparative literature, Erich Heller and Erich Auerbach, Hamsun was to be read as 'art', which does not mean they exclude 'politics'; they approach, rather, that which 'politics' tends to reduce. In his brief commentary from *Mimesis*, Auerbach notes that *Growth of the Soil*

employs a level of tone which blurs the dividing line between the direct or indirect discourse of the characters in the novel and the author's own utterances; as a result one is never quite certain that what one hears is being said

by the author as he stands outside the novel; the statements sound as though they came from one of the persons involved in the action, or at least from a passer by who observes the incident.⁶²

Going against the prevailing idea that *Growth of the Soil* is 'objective' or 'realist', Auerbach situates the novel, in the aftermath of the First World War, as part of the European novel's turn 'towards a disintegration and dissolution of external realities'. *Growth of the Soil*, henceforth, begins to look more like an internal conversation, a sense that is very much diminished in the English translations, because they insert quotation marks around spoken utterances, whereas the original differentiates between discursive levels in far more subtle ways. Hamsun used no quotation marks at this time, only dashes and tag-clauses ('he said: . . . – . . . she said'), and insisted on rendering dialogues within continuous blocks of text, mostly without paragraph breaks.⁶³ The effect is illustrated in Isak's search for a plot of land on the first page: 'now and again he speaks a word or two to himself: Oh yes, Good Lord! he says.' A few sentences on, the reported expletive is echoed by the narration itself: 'After a few hours, he leaves again, oh yes Good Lord! walking straight northwards again.'⁶⁴ Rather than 'omniscience', the text proceeds in a curious mode of *narrative simulation* where the writer, so to speak, 'joins in' and imitates his fictional characters. This invites, perhaps, the blinded simulations of Hamsun's many commentators and reviewers, who tend simply to believe what they read, while *only reading what they already believe* – from the political right to the political left.

Hamsun should not be 'saved' from the ambivalence of his work and politics and neither, I maintain, should this ambivalence be used as reassurance or consolation. Erich Heller, in his discussion of 'Hamsun's genius', points to moments that are 'bound to haunt the reader's mind', and which raise 'the large question of how imaginations differ with regard to their moral textures'.⁶⁵ The second part of this chapter develops an understanding of this 'haunting' in relation to monumentality, memory and reading in the aftermath.

Screen Memories

Following the Latin origin of the word, *monere*, the function of a 'monument' – 'his monumental work, *Growth of the Soil*' – would be 'to remind'; but to what, in the abyss of the text's survival *after* the Nobel Prize and *after* Nazism, would *Growth of the Soil* be a 'monument' today? The rehabilitation agenda after the Second World War has tended to affirm the text as a redemptive hymn to 'life', thus recycling the reception that came after the First World War and, more disturbingly still, the politics of self-protective amnesia articulated by Franz Stangl, the Treblinka extermination camp *Kommandant*, for whom *Growth of the Soil* held out the promise 'to start from the beginning; cleanly, quietly, only with my family which I loved around me'.

Growth of the Soil functions, here, as a 'screen memory' in the Freudian sense, as an agglomeration of 'mnemic images' that serve to circumvent psychical distress.⁶⁶ In 'Screen Memories' (1899), Freud's examples are always bucolic fantasies comprising idyllic countryside imagery complete with green meadows, cosy cottages and rustic peasant women. In other words, Freudian screen memories are, by definition, 'heimlich' – homely – the word he would theorize, many years later in 'The "Uncanny"' (1919), as developing 'in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*'.⁶⁷ Screen memories, according to Freud, are displacements or substitute images that stand in contiguous proximity to something repressed; they are cases of 'repression accompanied by the substitution of something in the neighbourhood'.⁶⁸ In 'Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence' (1896), Freud describes a female patient who 'hallucinated voices, which used to repeat long passages from Otto Ludvig's novel *Die Heiterethei* to her'. Trivial passages from the novel were 'forced on her attention with pathological strength': 'That's what the Heiterethei's cottage looked like! There's the spring and there are the bushes! How happy she was in spite of all her poverty!'⁶⁹ The 'pathological strength' of these screen memories was caused by 'other passages in the same work which had stirred up the most distressing thoughts'.⁷⁰

Not unlike Freud's evocation of unrelenting screen memories, *Growth of the Soil* is in fact dotted with affirmative exclamation marks. When the farmstead improves with the addition of a cow, for instance, 'there was scarcely anything lacking! Oh, that Inger – he loved her, and she loved him back, they were frugal, they lived in the age of the wooden spoon and were content. Let us sleep! they thought. And they slept.'⁷¹ And when Isak brings a cooking-stove from the village, Inger, exclaims: 'What a tremendous thing for us!'⁷² Katherine Mansfield's brief review of *Growth of the Soil* from 1920 respects the novel's epic 'message', but passes over the 'trite' rhetoric in order to celebrate the 'glow' and 'warmth' that 'lingers'; the 'wonder and thrill', the 'infinite delight in reading of how the track was made, the bush felled, the log hut built, so snug and warm with its great chimney and little door'.⁷³ Isak, says Mansfield, is 'as familiar as if we had known him in our childhood. It is, indeed, very much as though we were allowed to hold his hand and go with him everywhere'.⁷⁴

The infantilizing delights of *Growth of the Soil* should not be underestimated or brushed aside as mere banalities, because this is precisely what is at issue in Franz Stangl's fantasy of origin – and so many others! Stangl's interviewer, Gitta Sereny, notes that whenever the Nazi *Kommandant* 'had to deal with questions he found difficult to answer', he would exhibit the 'curious habit' of 'changing from the semi-formal German he usually speaks, to the popular vernacular of his childhood'; 'the "cosy" language and mannerisms', she says, 'were his instinctive refuge from danger' and whenever 'he tried to come to grips with the difficult question of his guilt, the sentence trailed off'.⁷⁵

Growth of the Soil, in this context, is also the 'instinctive refuge from danger', but a refuge with the uncanny aspect of a Freudian screen memory, because it

screens out 'something in the neighbourhood', that is to say, in the text itself, those 'other passages in the same work' by which 'the most distressing thoughts' can be 'stirred up'.⁷⁶ *Growth of the Soil* brutally ruptures *infantile* bliss with the horror of *infanticide*. As such, the novel has very little to do with the Nazi rhetoric of 'blood and soil', but a great deal more to do with the *aftermath* of Nazism, not least because the stories of infanticide pass through a series of narrative tropes by which certain associations may be 'stirred up': secret crimes and clandestine burials, disclosures of the unbearable, unsatisfactory legal processes – haunting, repetition and irresolution.

In case there is any doubt, my suggestion is not that *Growth of the Soil* is a 'pre-figuration', 'analogy' or 'parallel' to the legacies of the Nazi atrocities: the 'text' and the 'event' remain irreducible and radically heterogeneous to each other. The one does not reflect, and does certainly not comprehend, the other. Our question concerns, instead, the survival of the text, its capacity to 'linger on' – despite everything that ought to consign it to oblivion. Derrida offers a very striking articulation of the problematic of 'survival' in his essay 'Biodegradables' (1989), which likens 'great works' to nonbiodegradable nuclear waste, as that which resists assimilation, yet is 'assimilated as inassimilable'. Avoiding the traditional gesture of crediting the durability of 'great works' to the author's 'genius' and the text's 'richness', Derrida insists upon the 'irreplaceable singularity, the event of signature' which 'is not to be summoned up in a patronymic name' since it concerns 'the work itself', which is 'proper to nothing and to no one, reappropriable by nothing and by no one, not even the presumed bearer'.⁷⁷ To survive, the 'message' or 'meaning' of so-called 'great literature', says Derrida, 'has to link up *in a certain way* with that which exceeds it'.⁷⁸

In order to reflect upon how *Growth of the Soil* might 'link up *in a certain way* with that which exceeds it' – the conflicted aftermaths of Nazism – the remainder of this chapter traces some of the lingering figurations and narrative strands around the general 'growth' motif, those of excess, disfiguration, doubling and guilt.

Growth, Excess and Disfiguration

Chapter III from Part One is punctuated by three events of 'growth' or 'yield' (*grøde*) imbued with tender pleasure and holy reverence; first, the cow gives birth: 'And there lay a fine calf, a beauty of a she-calf, red-flanked like its mother and amusingly bewildered after the miracle it had passed through';⁷⁹ then, Inger gives birth: 'Isak felt curiously weak, the water troll was standing before a miracle; conceived in a sacred fog, it appeared in life with a little face, like an allegory';⁸⁰ the act of sowing grain, finally, occurs in the same 'sacred' register: 'And now these seeds will sprout and turn into ears and more grain.'⁸¹ By now, however, the homely growth motif is already 'disfigured'. When Inger arrives in Chapter I, as the blessed 'womenfolk help' Isak longs for, she 'wound her way

back and forth on the hillside for a long time before daring to come forth, and by the time she got round to doing so it was evening'. Describing her as 'a tall, brown-eyed girl, buxom and coarse', the narration simulates an avoidance with which Inger herself is engaged: 'she spoke so unclearly and, besides, turned her face away'.⁸² When it finally dawns on the slow-witted Isak that she has come to him alone, they immediately settle down to enjoy food and coffee – 'before they went to bed. At night he lay feeling greedy for her and got her.'⁸³ There is, to wit, no sentimentality here, but a curious kind of animalistic tenderness alongside which a strange narrative tension builds. Only the next day does the text identify Inger's 'disfigured mouth' – a harelip:

Without this disfigured mouth she wasn't likely to have come to him, the harelip was his good luck. And he himself, was he without blemish? Isak with the iron beard and excessively trunk-like body, he was like a horrible water troll, yes as if seen through a whorl in the windowpane. And who else went around with such a look on their face! He seemed capable of turning loose a kind of Barabbas at any moment. It was a wonder Inger didn't run away.⁸⁴

The text preaches here a kind equality-in-deformity; together, Isak and Inger are, indeed, figures of growth *in excess*, as the narration exclaims in Chapter III: 'Those lonely people, yes so ugly and much too fertile, but good for each other, for the animals and for the soil!'⁸⁵ From the moment the woman arrives, the growth motifs sprout in voluptuous abundance, but are held within the social structure of sexual segregation, whereby the woman is tied to domesticity and reproduction while the man works the fields. This division is doubled in the growth of potatoes, which the text opposes to the holy, 'masculine' status of grain: 'there was nothing mystical about them, nothing religious; women and children could join in the planting; these earth apples that came from foreign lands'.⁸⁶ Potatoes are thus playfully denigrated as 'feminine' and 'foreign', and yet, when drought subsequently threatens the grain, a long passage praising the durable potato ensues, in Chapter IV: 'a fruit like no other, standing up in drought, standing up in rain, and always growing. It defies the weather and puts up with a lot; if it is fairly well treated it will yield a fifteenfold return.'⁸⁷ There remains, however, something disconcerting about their growth, as 'the potatoes were in full bloom, flowering unnaturally and brilliantly'.⁸⁸ Finally, while Isak worries about these 'unnatural' potato crops, now flowering 'worse than ever, with big berries growing out at the top, which was far from right', the haughty Inger has to dig up a plant, in order to show Isak their tremendous yield – 20 new potatoes!

And they have five weeks to grow yet! said Inger. – That Inger, she would so dearly have consoled and spoken well with her hare-mouth. And what dreadful speech it was, she hissed, it was like a valve leaking steam; but her consolation was a good thing in the wilds. And she had a lively nature. – If you could

make another bed! she said to Isak. Now, he said. Well-well, there's no rush, but.⁸⁹

In the immediate vicinity of potatoes as excessive growth, regenerating 'fifteen-fold', stands Inger, 'like a valve leaking steam'. Femininity, henceforth, is figured through reproduction and yield on the one hand, and splits and disfiguration on the other. While Isak and Inger are joined as 'ugly' outcasts of modernity, rooted to 'nature' by their coarse ripeness, described with great affection, feminine difference nonetheless ruptures the frame, as the simile – 'a valve leaking steam' – is a figure of modernity. The growth motif will later become part of the novel's sardonic rhetoric against the capitalist modernity that invades the wilds: 'It was all good', quips the narration in Part Two, as the mountains sound with dynamite blasts, 'the wilderness had come to life, money was blossoming'.⁹⁰ At this stage, however, the trauma of infanticide has already occurred, turning the 'soil' or the 'field' (*Marken*) away from its status as the source of 'growth' and 'yield' (*grøde*), since it is now also a depository of expired life – for Inger kills and buries her third child, a girl, because she, like herself, is born with a harelip; and later Barbro, the young wife of Axel, a new settler in the wilds, has an 'accident' leading to the drowning of her newborn child, and abandons its dead body unburied and unmourned under a bush. *Growth of the Soil* thus sets in motion a crisis of sexual difference, growth and stifled reproduction before the rhetoric against modernity takes hold – a crisis that keeps returning.

Repetitions, Returns and Doubles

In its complex weave of overlapping narrative strands, *Growth of the Soil* simulates the passage of time, from Inger's 'misdeed', to the revelation of her terrible secret, thanks to her eagle-eyed relative, Oline, who discovers her mourning her loss at the secret grave. What is homely thus becomes unhomely in another sense, as Freud's formulation (borrowed from Schelling) suggests, 'everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'.⁹¹ As the days go by, and Inger and Isak shuttle from one task to another, 'the misdeed slipped bit by bit into the background of their thoughts. But it hung over the people and the place all the time.'⁹² It keeps coming up, unforgettably, in the interstices of mutual inarticulation between Isak's helpless acceptance and Inger's inconsolable guilt:

Isak was reasonable from the beginning, he said as much to his wife: what were you doing! he said. – To this Inger did not answer. – And after a while Isak spoke again: Is it so that you have throttled it? – Yes, said Inger. – You shouldn't have done it. – No, she answered. – And neither can I understand

how you could do it. She was just exactly like me, answered Inger. – How? – In the mouth. Isak thought at length about this: Oh well, he said.⁹³

Condemned to repeat, the conversation is doubled a few pages on:

The investigation took its time, Inger was questioned alone, she denied nothing, the grave in the forest was opened and emptied, the corpse was sent for examination. And that little corpse, it was dressed in Eleseus' christening robe and had the cap with pearls on.

Isak was apparently awoken to speak again: Well, it's as bad as it can be for us now, he said. I still say as I've said before, that you shouldn't have done it. – No, answered Inger. – What were you doing? – Inger didn't answer. – And that you could get it into your head? – She was born like me. So I twisted her face around. – Isak shook his head. – And then she was dead, continued Inger and burst out crying. – Isak kept quiet for a while: Oh well, it's too late to cry now, he said. – She had brown hair on the nape of her neck, Inger sobbed.

Thus it ended again.

And on went the days. . . .⁹⁴

The sense of regret lingers on in the interstices of time: 'in November, Inger said, Now she could have been half a year old and known us all – It can't be helped now, said Isak.'⁹⁵ Once again, when Isak returns from the village with toys for their two sons, Eleseus and Sivert, Inger 'turned away and cried. What is it? Isak asked. – Inger answered: Right now she would have been a year old and could have understood all this! – Oh well, but you know how she was, Isak said to console her.'⁹⁶ Days, months and years pass by inexorably, as the text now begins to employ saga-like formulas at the start of each chapter: 'The days go by'; 'The years go by', until Inger returns from her prison sentence in Trondheim, whereupon Chapter XII declares: 'Now all is well.'⁹⁷

Inger's return, her returning, is the subject of a whole chapter, which returns things to familiarity just as assuredly as it makes everything strange, as the return revolves around uncanny sameness and otherness. When Isak goes to meet Inger in the coastal village, he cuts off his enormous Moses beard *en route* from the farm, but fails to recognize Inger, because her face has changed too; her harelip has been stitched together, leaving only 'a red stripe'. Inger also brings their fourth child, a girl born in prison with 'the features of their small boys, the brown eyes and the oval cheeks they all had from their mother; they were their mother's children, which was good and well!'⁹⁸ Direct comparison to the dead baby girl is not made, but the implication is palpable: the suture (in Inger's mouth) and the substitute (the girl, Leopoldine) serve to close the wound of disfiguration and infanticide. Still, the text only underscores the strangeness of this 'return' – of returning to the *same*, but returning as *other*. Thus, while Isak initially fails to recognize Inger on account of her suture, he remains, for her,

identical. 'Hm! said Isak all at once, he was so peculiar, oh he was a stranger among them.' Looking at them, his wife 'was foreign in her clothes and appearance, fine, without a harelip, only a red stripe over her mouth'.⁹⁹ Leopoldine, meanwhile, 'spoke in song, in an unbelievable language from Trondhjem, the father needed translation now and then'.¹⁰⁰ And while Inger and Leopoldine, for Isak, evoke something that is strange by its unfamiliarity, for Inger, Isak is strange by his familiarity: 'You haven't changed much, said Inger looking at her husband'; 'I'm looking at you and can see you are just as before, says Inger'; 'A little later she heard herself whisper: You – you are the same – as you were!'¹⁰¹

To the moving strangeness around the same and the other comes the endearing haplessness of Isak, his attempts to impress his wife and daughter, and his failure to realize that his new beardless appearance, alongside Inger and Leopoldine, makes all of them look like strangers as they approach home, where the two boys, Elseus and Sivert, momentarily fail to recognize any of them. 'Now all is well', declares the next Chapter XII, after which Chapter XVI, however, once again underscores the 'changes', 'Great changes at Sellanraa. Indeed, nothing was recognisable from the first days.'¹⁰²

These 'changes' are ostensibly about the expansion of the farmstead, but the chapter dwells instead upon the seasonal shift into Autumn, where the spectre of infanticide seems to linger. A small tarn north of Sellanraa, the reader is told apropos of nothing in particular, has 'tiny baby fish that never grew large, they lived and died there and never came to anything'. Listening out for cowbells one evening, Inger hears something from the tarn: the sound 'was so small and hardly there, but lost. It was the song of these small fishes.'¹⁰³ Autumn thunder makes grazing cattle 'huddle together' as if 'waiting': 'What did they hang their heads for? Were they waiting for the end? And what were the people in the wilds waiting for when they stood in the storm, with their heads bowed?'¹⁰⁴ Small details of the landscape turn into figures of bodily dismemberment, as people 'come home with many secrets in their minds. Had they inadvertently stepped on an ant and glued its hind part to the path, so that its upper body couldn't come away?'

And not even those big boletus mushrooms are meaningless . . . A boletus mushroom does not flower and does not move, but there is something upturned about it and it is a monstrosity, it looks like a living lung standing there naked, without a body.¹⁰⁵

The implacable narrative voice, proceeding by interrogative questions, seems to read the landscape in the way Freud reads hysterical symptoms on the bodies of his patients, except that the buried secrets, of which physical symptoms speak, are not uncovered or articulated into relations of cause and effect, but left to linger as uncanny significations, speaking their own disorientated language. The haunting association with infanticide, as growth stifled but still

reduplicating itself in other ways, is linked only tentatively with Inger, who 'probably had more reason than others to expect divine chastisement'; 'she knew, after all, that God walked around in the evening inspecting his wilderness, and would be sure to find her with his fabulous eyes.'¹⁰⁶ Inger's religious gloom 'infects' Isak who also becomes subdued in the darkness of the winter months, until, one night in the wilds, he encounters 'something standing in front of him, a being, a spirit, grey silk – no it was nothing. He had a funny feeling, took a short, faltering step forward and walked straight towards a look, a large look, two eyes'.¹⁰⁷ Hamsunian humour gradually overtakes the uncanny encounter, as 'Isak knitted his brows, as if starting to get suspicious'; 'What, exactly, had he caught Isak doing? To sit still tilling the soil in your thoughts couldn't possibly have angered him.'¹⁰⁸ Believing he has met none other than the devil, Isak crosses himself and shouts 'In Jesus' name!', whereupon the eyes disappear, allowing him to return home with 'a lofty air, like a real man – indeed, like a man of the world'.¹⁰⁹ The atmosphere of gloom lifts, as often happens in Hamsun, with a touch of comedy. In the vicinity of the exorcism Isak performs, however, is the former grave of the dead infant, which keeps returning, as figures of stifled growth, upturned life, bodily dismemberment and disembodied eyes – before Part Two repeats or refracts the scene of infanticide 'in the neighbourhood' of Sellanraa.

To summarize, the new settler, Axel Strøm, doubles the slow-witted but trusty peasant, Isak. Unlike Isak, however, he does not acquire secure 'womenfolk-help' in his partner, Barbro, whose replication of Inger's infection by the ways of the city *after* her prison sentence comes *before* her own act of infanticide. Unlike Inger, moreover, Barbro is noted for her beauty and does not, therefore, have the deformity or background of social exclusion that Inger has suffered. Barbro's pregnancy is no 'blessing' but, rather, a disadvantage in her power struggle with Axel, who hopes motherhood will shackle her to himself and his farm. His designs, however, are thwarted by the 'accidental' death of their newborn baby, which occurs out of sight, but gradually unravels. Axel, who soon grows suspicious and worried, is beaten back by Barbro's inconsistent and callous arguments: 'first, she hadn't done it. Second, it didn't matter if she had. But, thirdly, it would never come out.'¹¹⁰ The crime is never confessed to, and neither is the child buried or mourned by its mother; here, it is instead Axel who comes to implicate himself by burying and concealing the child. As with the first scene, it now falls to Inger's relative, the gossipy old widow Oline, to sniff out the buried corpse and spread the news with pious malice. And, as Geissler acted as Isak's unofficial advocate, securing a reduced prison term for Inger (or so he claims), he now appears as Axel's confidant, apparently working behind the scenes of Barbro's trial to ensure her acquittal – so that *Axel* won't be implicated.

Although the scene of the trial, even at this juncture, never resolves the crises of guilt and implication the novel has set in motion, the general sentiment is not unlike the scathing criticism Hamsun directed at liberal feminism

and humanistic legal practice in his notorious 1915 polemic, which reacted against the sentencing of 'a young girl' to 8 months' imprisonment for killing her newborn child: 'This girl and mother', writes the polemicist, 'is without love, without responsibility, without a calling, but the child, however, could have come to something'. The difference between the 1915 polemic and the 1917 novel is that no narrative voice or character – not even Geissler – preaches the biblical eye-for-an-eye rhetoric of Hamsun's polemic. The 'child', he argued, was worth more than 'the mother', and also 'the father': 'Hang both parents, clear them out! Hang the first hundred of them, because they have no hope . . . Let something be done, let the children have peace from these grips around their necks, from all this blood and all these murders!'¹¹¹ The impassioned brutality of Hamsun's polemic is altogether displaced in *Growth of the Soil*, which instead focuses its attention on lampooning liberal feminism, as figured in the risible character of 'Mrs Bailiff Heyerdahl'. When Barbro is finally brought before the law, it is Mrs Heyerdahl who offers a testimony in her defence:

It's the men who make the laws, we women have no influence on that. But can a man imagine what it means for a woman to give birth? . . . Society despises the unmarried woman who is going to have a child . . . she is to be treated as a criminal for it . . . Another side to the question is this: Why is the man to go free? . . . Because the laws are made by men.¹¹²

The entire argument is, of course, rendered farcical since Barbro's defence rests on a 'not guilty' plea. Mrs Heyerdahl's benevolent employment of Barbro – following her acquittal – as a servant in her household in the village, moreover, is comically undermined as Barbro flouts her authority by escaping to barn dances and erotic excursions at night. *Growth of the Soil*, thus, sets up liberal feminism as so much humbug, while orchestrating events so that Barbro eventually returns to Axel, and becomes pregnant, while Mrs Heyerdahl, against her avowed intention *not* to rear children (as a progressive 'feminist') also winds up pregnant, and not just once but, in the course of time, twice.

Does *Growth of the Soil*, then, ever resolve the horror of infanticide around which its entire rhetoric of growth and reproduction revolves? The barrage of 'lessons' the narrative exacts upon Mrs Heyerdahl and Barbro, only seem to displace the horror and the guilt emanating from the supposed Garden of Eden up at Sellanraa. 'Imagine the moment the murderer stands over the child and tightens her grip!' wrote Hamsun in the 1915 polemic.¹¹³ *Growth of the Soil* proceeds to imagine that very scene in Chapter VI, Part One, when Inger gives birth and throttles her child. Beginning in the mode of narrative simulation – 'a struggle is taking place in her bowels, a burden suddenly slides away' – Hamsun's narration suddenly seems to turn away, mid-sentence, in abject horror, as if to avert its eyes: 'Her face turns grey and expressionless, disbelieving, a groan is heard, it is so unnatural, so impossible, like a twisted howl is emitted from her.'¹¹⁴

Conclusion

Infanticide is the terrible counter-motif to the rhetoric of 'growth' and 'yield', that which generates so many uneasy 'returns'. The novel tells, nevertheless, of two different responses to the crisis of guilt it sets in motion: in the first instance (Inger–Isak), acceptance of guilt followed by suffering, haunting and repetition and, in the second instance (Axel–Barbro), denial, complicity, and moral decrepitude. In both cases, the crisis of guilt is never resolved, only portioned out one-sidedly in the structure of sexual segregation, and displaced by regeneration, leaving Isak as the dim-witted peasant who exorcizes the apparition, and Inger as the woman who has to carry her guilt. *Growth of the Soil* doesn't end – as the canons of aesthetic unity would suppose – with its 'origin', with the figure of the heroic peasant, Isak, who increasingly turns into a mere cipher for Hamsun's 'back to the land' rhetoric, as he sows the grain on the last page while the 'forest and mountains are watching' this 'supreme and majestic' act, with all its 'meaning and purpose'.¹¹⁵ The narration, here, simply asserts the message it wishes to convey, while the closing lines return to Inger, tied to domesticity, and figured as a mere 'dot', as the monumental march of time, the cycle of the seasons, day and night, proceed:

So be it, Inger has sailed on the high seas and lived in the city, now she is home again; the world is wide, swarming with tiny dots, Inger has swarmed with the rest. She was almost nobody among the living, only one.

Then comes the evening.¹¹⁶

The elevation of Isak into a monument, alongside the reduction of Inger to a mere 'dot', asserts an oppressive monumentality. After the Nobel Prize, after Nazism, and after the rehabilitations of the postwar era, *Growth of the Soil* often appears as nothing but a monumental 'erection' – powerful and durable in effect but 'empty as such', as Jacques Lacan said of phallic signifiers. My argument in this chapter, however, has been that the novel's survival proceeds from that which exceeds such unity, fixity and rigidity. As a 'double monument', the text is divided and duplicitous, split and implicated in an uncanny structure of growth and transplantation, of border-crossing and doubling, that is, in a heterogeneous formation of haunting. The style, narration and composition out-flanks what is explicitly stated, and it is the pathos of those 'tiny dots' – Inger ('almost nobody') and Eleseus ('almost nothing') – that lingers.

Chapter 6

Reading Hamsun, Reading Nazism

You must not excuse me, I am not to be excused. I read newspapers, and know what I am writing about.

Knut Hamsun, Tidens Tegn, 9 December 1935¹

The condemnation of Nazism, whatever must be the consensus on this subject, is not yet a thinking of Nazism.

Jacques Derrida²

Only to be condemned is the thought that puts itself deliberately (or confusedly, emotionally) at the service of an ideology behind which it hides, or from whose strength it profits.

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy³

The cultural policy of the Nazis, inaugurated by the notorious book burnings of 1933, removed from the German public sphere the works of Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Thomas Mann, Maxim Gorky, Émile Zola, Marcel Proust, H. G. Wells, and a host of other writers deemed 'Jewish', 'bolshevist' or 'anti-German'.⁴ It entailed tight control and censorship of literary publishing in the Third Reich – and, also, an obvious market advantage for other authors, such as Hamsun, whose sales now increased by a significant margin.⁵ Although the books piled on the bonfires in Berlin included works by authors who had admired Hamsun (Mann, Gorky, Wells), and by figures influential for the Norwegian author's early development (Zola), Hamsun himself appears to have remained silent on the matter. Neither is there any evidence to suggest he ever objected to the use of his name, and his writings, for the purposes of Nazi propaganda. The German translations of *Pan*, *Victoria* and *Growth of the Soil* were all reissued during the Second World War, and even appeared in times of scarce paper supply as Front editions and Wehrmacht editions as late as 1944.⁶ When we add, in this context, that Hamsun (by now ensconced on his grand farm, Nørholm, in southern Norway) had been an apologist for the German Nazi regime since the early 1930s, publicly supported the German Occupation of Norway in 1940, and marked the end of the Second World War with a deferent obituary to Hitler in 1945, it is necessary and unavoidable to conclude: the

Nazis supported Hamsun's writings; Hamsun's writings supported the Nazis. This is the abrupt point of convergence at which incensed condemnations abolish reading and panicky apologies take fright.

'Reading Hamsun, Reading Nazism': this chapter proposes a different way of opening up the questions, and the perils, of what happened – and continues to happen – in the conjunction of 'Hamsun' and 'Nazism'. I will maintain, first of all, that the 'reading' of Hamsun's oeuvre by the Nazis was in no way identical to Hamsun's 'reading' of Nazism. One has to differentiate, here, between two different historical trajectories in order, precisely, to better understand their moments of convergence, the ruptures between them and, most disconcertingly, *a certain convergence of the ruptures in 'Hamsun' with the ruptures in 'Nazism'*. There will have been, first of all, certain *ways of reading* 'Hamsun' within Nazi Germany. Although Hamsun's public support for Nazism was indeed known in Germany in the 1930s, it was nonetheless his *literary* works that were read, cherished and canonized by Nazi ideologues and countless others. As we shall see, both the chief ideologue of the Third Reich, Alfred Rosenberg, and the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger (who was an opportunistic supporter in the first ten months of Nazism, after which he retreated to the margins of the movement), give us clues as to how the Hamsun-reference was orchestrated in Nazi Germany during the 1930s. Their references to Hamsun begin to indicate a problem that has been avoided for too long, because it is difficult to access: *How did Nazism read Hamsun?* This question is burdened by a second question that arises the moment the first is uttered: *How did Hamsun read Nazism?* To approach the latter, one has to begin with the observation that Hamsun's ways of reading Nazism are most obviously accessible through his polemical writings, those written mostly in the context of the Norwegian public sphere and, hence, at a certain remove from the Nazi orchestration of the Hamsun-reference in Germany. Hamsun's politics, conversely, cannot be explained by reference to any doctrine specific to German Nazism, but rather to the conflicts of Norwegian politics in the period concerned. This chapter, then, proceeds through two supplemental moments of inscription, as it were: the Nazi reading of Hamsun in Germany, and the Hamsunian reading of Nazism in Norway.

It is easy to see how any dogmatic separation of these two areas of analysis can serve the agendas of dissimulation, dissociation and apologia, however, my conclusions move towards the very opposite: a condemnation of the pervasive logic which presumes one can finally condemn Nazism as a 'foreign affair', as if it had nothing to do with critical failures much closer to home.

Nazi Orchestrations of the Hamsun-reference

In his original essay on Hamsun from 1936, Leo Löwenthal quotes a long passage from Alfred Rosenberg's Nazi tract, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930). The fact that Rosenberg praised Hamsun at such length, and in a book

that was required reading in Nazi Germany, argues Löwenthal, is the 'final pointed proof' of Hamsun's latent 'authoritarianism'. There is, for Löwenthal, a deeper *kinship* or structure of reciprocity which, moreover, would *exclude* both Hamsun and Rosenberg from the realms of literature and art. Rosenberg's book is one that 'almost without exception rejects the great literature of the nineteenth century', writes Löwenthal.⁷ Over 40 years later, Löwenthal would recall Hamsun as 'a touchstone for me to use in distinguishing between what is and what is not a genuine work of art'.⁸ The gesture of exclusion Löwenthal re-inscribes, I would maintain, happens in a very anxious space where one ought to think a little more carefully about *the logic of exclusion* as such, especially as this pertains to Nazism.

Rosenberg does not simply 'reject' so-called great literature in *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*; he seeks legitimacy therein, as can be seen in his copious references to Shakespeare, Goethe, Wagner, Dickens and Ibsen, to mention but a few. As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy argue, National Socialism involved a certain 'fusion of politics and art' which was central to the founding gesture of the Nazi myth: '*the production of the political as work of art*'.⁹ Its basic principle or logic was that of 'mimetic will-to-identity' and 'self-fulfilment of form'.¹⁰ This logic is deposited in the very form and stylistic qualities of Hitler's and Rosenberg's writings, where there is 'neither knowledge to establish, nor thought to overcome'; 'only an already acquired, already available truth to declare'.¹¹

At the point when the Hamsun-reference is made in *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, Rosenberg is busy constructing a grand, evolutionary narrative in which he claims to detect the progressive purging of Judeo-Christian influences in art and, alongside this, the emergence of a new 'mythos' based on a Greek-Nordic heritage, a 'German song of eternal becoming and struggle for being'.¹² Hamsun is inscribed, here, as a veritable beacon of evolutionary becoming: 'In no other artist is this mystical-natural expression of the will shaped more imposingly than in Knut Hamsun.'¹³ After praising *Growth of the Soil* as 'the great present day epic of the Nordic will in its primordial form', Rosenberg goes on to consider *Wayfarers* (*Landstrykere*, 1927) which, he says, 'appears as the counterpiece to the character of the earth-immersed Isak':

In the same medium *Hamsun*, in a mysterious natural insight, describes the laws of the universe and of the soul. Once again the characters are peasants, fishermen, merchants, in whom a world is reflected. Through travel, through unsatisfied longings, they lose contact with Mother Earth whose blessing is no longer with them. They move from place to place, exchanging activities and loving. But since the roots are torn out of the strength-giving earth, the blossoms also die. So they live their lives – Edevart, August, Lovise Margrets [of *Wayfarers*] – without knowing why and without direction. They are symbols of decline, transition in the best case, experimental fragments of mankind, arriving at new forms and types, but unable to create values or gain honour.

They live as the past for the past has captured them, self-evidently and mysteriously. Yet the Nordic spirit is never fully repressed or lost.¹⁴

The politico-artistic direction of this proceeds, crucially, from the lines that frame everything ('mysterious natural insight' and 'Nordic spirit') and the motifs dotted throughout ('Mother Earth', 'strength-giving earth', 'honour'), knitted around what is, on the whole, a fairly *standard* reading of Hamsun's later works – even today. The trouble arising from this would affect Atle Kittang's argument that Hamsun's literary works, by their 'restless reflection around the cleavages and fissures of existence',¹⁵ are capable of 'deconstructing fixed opinions' in a way that offers 'the best protection against all ideological temptations – not least those Hamsun himself fell for'.¹⁶ Rosenberg's reading, in fact, suggests that Hamsun's position in the Nazi canon was not possible *only* on account of the soil-bound peasant, but *also* on account of the displaced and uprooted figures upon which his works always dwell. Thus, when Kittang suggests that the 'literary' preoccupation with displacement, wandering and liminality can be mobilized to *oppose* Nazism, one is forced to observe that it proves only too easy for Rosenberg's rhetoric to *recuperate* that same 'reflection' within a Nazi diagnostic of society seeking diabolical remedies.

Rosenberg's weave of general Nazi motifs around Hamsun's *Wayfarers*, however, posits a teleology – or self-fulfilment of form – which moves inexorably towards 'new forms and types', in Rosenberg's words, toward the 'Nordic spirit'. The logic of his reading, which performs as it were the mimetic will-to-identity, *overrides*, however, the underlying logic of Hamsun's figures of rootlessness and wandering – which are never finally eradicated in his literary works, quite the contrary. They keep coming back. And they come back in Heidegger's project in a different way. His *Introduction to Metaphysics*, first published in 1953, is based upon a series of lectures at the University of Freiburg in 1935, when the Nazi regime was at its height and he had retreated from publicly endorsing the movement. Derrida usefully calls attention to the internal differences and ideological tensions within the Nazi movement, 'the fractions and factions among which Heidegger situated himself' and 'the biologizing tendencies, à la Rosenberg, that won out in the end'.¹⁷ Heidegger tried to profit from the 'Nazi idiom' by his 'cunning strategy in the use of the word "spirit"' – with the result, however, that his philosophy 'opposed to actual Nazism, to its dominant strain, only a more "revolutionary" and purer Nazism'.¹⁸ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, indeed, is scornful about 'what is peddled about nowadays as the philosophy of National Socialism, but which has not the least to do with the inner truth and greatness of this movement'.¹⁹ What, then, is the function of the Hamsun-reference here?

Heidegger impels philosophy to '*repeat and retrieve* the inception of our historical-spiritual Dasein' (being-there). To 'repeat' and 'retrieve', he insists, is not to 'imitate' some notional past but rather to initiate 'the other inception', 'with all the strangeness, darkness, insecurity that a genuine inception brings

with it'.²⁰ Rather than the pseudo-Darwinian 'struggle for being' one finds in Rosenberg, therefore, Heidegger is in search 'for a ground that is supposed to ground the dominance of beings as an overcoming of Nothing', a 'genuine' and 'dark' affirmation of the Being of beings.²¹ The function of the Hamsun-reference, in this context, is to 'indicate' what is *unfamiliar*: 'the possibility of not-Being'.²² Picking up what had now become the third instalment of Hamsun's *Wayfarers* trilogy – *Yet Life Lives* (*Men Livet Lever*, 1936) – Heidegger says the main character, August, 'embodies the uprooted, universal know-how of today's humanity, but in the form of a Dasein that cannot lose its ties to the unfamiliar':

In his last days, this August is alone in the high mountains. The poet says: 'He sits here between his ears and hears true emptiness. Quite amusing, a fancy. On the ocean (earlier, August often went to sea) something stirred (at least), and there, there was a sound, something audible, a water chorus. Here – nothing meets nothing and is not there, there is not even a hole. One can only shake one's head in resignation.'²³

The Hamsun-reference, then, serves to indicate the 'unfamiliarity' of 'nothing' in Western Metaphysics, which 'cannot begin to speak about Nothing immediately' but which must acknowledge that there is nonetheless 'something peculiar about Nothing'.²⁴ The unfamiliar peculiarity of Nothing, Heidegger comments, 'prevents us, in our questioning, from beginning directly with beings as unquestionably given'.²⁵ In sharp contrast to the blinded certitudes of Rosenberg – for whom Hamsun, 'self-evidently and mysteriously'; 'in a mysterious natural insight' 'describes the laws of the universe and of the soul' – Heidegger's interest in Hamsun is bound up with the destabilization of Being. What is 'genuine and superior' in Hamsun's prose, says Heidegger, is in fact the sense of 'despairing powerlessness' – which, however, begins to set out the ground that should ground 'the dominance of beings as an overcoming of Nothing'. The movement of Heidegger's discourse is profoundly destabilizing of, and yet, deeply complicit with, the mythic guarantee of Nazi 'will-to-identity' and 'self-fulfilment of form'. The logic of the Nazi myth, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy emphasize, 'belongs profoundly to the mood or character of the West in general, and more precisely, to the fundamental tendency of the subject, in the metaphysical sense of the word'.²⁶ Like Heidegger, Hamsun comes to occupy an uncertain place in this tradition, and one that demands – always – to be read with care. The contrast between Rosenberg and Heidegger indicates, furthermore, divergent readings of Hamsun under the Nazi regime. By no means unified, transparent or self-evident, the Hamsun-reference was, at once, a means for *legitimizing* competing doctrines within Nazi Germany and, also, a means of working through the splits and schisms of 'being' (Heidegger), or else the imposition of a self-fulfilment posited in advance of thought (Rosenberg), and all the diabolical possibilities that can entail.

The *Wayfarers* trilogy, repeatedly and indeed obsessively, returns to the motif of the marginal peasant community facing the bitter transformations of modernity, recycling in seemingly endless variations the theme of uprootedness, wandering and migration. The critic and translator Sverre Lyngstad discerns in his reading of the *Wayfarers* trilogy a recurring narrative tension between the chronological time of modernity and the cyclical time of the seasons, coalescing around Hamsun's puzzling temporal patterns and deployment of organic metaphors. The organic metaphors of rootedness, argues Lyngstad, complicate the general 'back to the land' policy Hamsun had been advocating in a number of polemical articles since *Growth of the Soil*:

While on the level of ideas Hamsun is a champion of rootedness, of living out one's life where one was born, the rhetoric of the organic metaphor savors of inevitable decay, of mortality. Mobility, on the other hand, means endless expectation, constant novelty, an open future.²⁷

In light of this, it should be observed that the *Wayfarers* trilogy (and indeed *Growth of the Soil*), articulates the ruptures of tradition and modernity in a way that found a certain resonance with ruptures within the Nazi movement, but which do not belong exclusively to this: where Rosenberg reads the figures of rootlessness as 'symbols of decline' after 'the roots are torn out of the strength-giving earth', Heidegger reads the same figures as 'a form of a Dasein that cannot lose its ties to the unfamiliar'. The disturbing implication is that Nazi appropriation responded to what perhaps every reading of Hamsun responds to: the schisms, doublings and splits which the author's politics, and not least the politics of Nazism, only sought to overcome – or eradicate.

As we move on to Hamsun's reading of Nazism in the 1930s and 40s, we have to contend with schisms, splits and doublings of another kind. These do not concern the internal tensions of the literary works, but rather, the problem of grasping the traffic of events, forces and political beliefs which situated, and so enable an informed reading, critique and deconstruction of Hamsun's polemical articles.

The Rhetoric of 'National Unification'

On 10 July 1934, the Norwegian conservative daily, *Aftenposten*, carried an article by Hamsun entitled 'Wait and See'. This was a polemic against Johan Fredrik Paasche, a Norwegian literary historian critical of the German Nazi regime. By this time, it should be recalled, the Nazis' authoritarianism was widely reported, with criticism and condemnation, as well as apologia. Following the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor in January 1933, dictatorship had been imposed by the use of emergency powers. German police were given rights to imprison people indefinitely without charges or hearings, to search houses and

requisition property, and to censor or ban newspapers. In May, the labour unions were dissolved; in July, all other political parties were banned, making Germany a single party state.²⁸ The polemic between Paasche and Hamsun took place in the immediate aftermath of a bloody event: Hitler's purge within his own party, the NSDAP on 30 June 1934, in which over a hundred party members were murdered for alleged subversion.²⁹ In Norway, Paasche now urged 'nationally minded Norwegian youth who more or less believed in Nazism' to draw the lessons:

In Germany they have had national unification [*nasjonal samling*], but there is no unification [*samling*] here. In the long run freedom unifies more strongly than force, parties more than dictatorship. What we have of cultural benefits in Norway today . . . we would not have had without the rights of the individual and parties to speak freely.³⁰

The references to 'national unification' (*nasjonal samling*) directly allude to Vidkun Quisling's fascist-style party, National Union (*Nasjonal Samling*, hereafter abbreviated as NS), which had been established that year. Hamsun's response to Paasche, however, was not concerned with such 'internal affairs':

What if Mr. Professor Dr. Frederick Paasche did wait and see. What if he had thought that it concerned a *fundamental* transformation of a society of 66 million people, and that Germany has struggled through this for fifteen months, has tried things out, has made mistakes, has tried again – all this under *the whole world's economic, political and moral hostility*.³¹

As alibi, Hamsun quotes a 'telegraphic editorial' from the right-wing daily, *Tidens Tegn*, written by Schancke Jonasen:

He is no Nazi, but neither is he a scandalmonger, and he happens to be on location. He opens his article thus:

'A people who have experienced four years of war against a world of enemies, and who have gone through the bitterness of defeat, and who are ravaged by all the ailments of the post-war: revolution, communism, inflation, crisis and attempted coups, are both spiritually and materially in an extraordinarily difficult situation.' Etc.

What if also Mr Paasche had noticed that there were certain conditions for the latest bloody drama in Germany. [. . .] No, back with the previous Germany, with the republic, when the communists, the Jews and Brüning governed this Nordic land!³²

This is certainly chilling, and goes some way towards explaining why literary scholarship, on the whole, has tended to avoid the polemical articles. What, indeed, is there to *read* here, other than statements demonstrating Hamsun's

acceptance of state violence, denial of free speech, brutal repression and anti-Semitism? I have quoted and translated both articles here, at length, in order to illustrate how Hamsun's reading of 'Nazism' and 'fascism' was tied up with *specific* polemical exchanges in Norway concerning the question of 'national unification', which, nonetheless, involved highly *generalized* positions and implications beyond the domestic context.

How should we read, first of all, the manifestation of anti-Semitism? His references to Jews in an anti-Semitic register were rare, intermittent and, just as often, contradicted by his actions and his writings.³³ Hamsun later dismissed the charge of anti-Semitism in *On Overgrown Paths*, asserting that he was not aware of any 'anti-Jewish' attitudes in his work: 'Me affronting the Jews?'³⁴ If anti-Semitism did not actively structure Hamsun's rhetoric, it is nonetheless notable, on the occasions when it does occur, how easily it allows itself to be 'slotted in'. An older logic repeats itself here, and stretches right back to the American polemic from 1889 when Hamsun, dressed up as a European man of letters, ends on a note of vile racism directed at African Americans. If racism happens only on the rarest occasions in Hamsun's writings, this should not mitigate for the *ease* with which it occurs. There is a wider logic at work here, a structure of reciprocal 'propping up', as it were, in which the distinction between how Hamsun read Nazism, and how Nazism read Hamsun, collapses into a kind of mutual reciprocity, in which the acquiescence of the one (Hamsun), only tolerates and props up the racism of the other (Nazism).

Hamsun's sarcasm towards Paasche – or more precisely, towards the left-liberal opposition to fascist 'national unification' – implies, without saying so directly, that it must be 'obvious' that national unity excludes political and ethnic difference, at least in the realm of governance. The idea that Weimar Germany had been misruled by 'the communists, the Jews and Brüning', doubles the common strain of anti-parliamentarism in Norwegian politics at this time, the idea that democracy amounted to ineffective squabbling. Since Norwegian national independence in 1905, governments changed hands after relatively short intervals, initially dominated by the old dichotomy between Liberals (*Venstre*) and Conservatives (*Høyre*) and, from the 1920s onwards, disrupted by the growth of the Labour Party (*Arbeiderpartiet*) and the Agrarian Party (*Bondepartiet*), introducing a plurality of splits between traditional positions and emerging differences between urban socialism and rural conservatism. The big ideological confrontation of the 1920s had revolved around Labour's status as a revolutionary party of class struggle. Labour's reputation as 'revolutionary' and 'communist' would last well into the 1930s, even though the party had renounced its official commitment to armed revolution and proletarian dictatorship in 1923 (following Labour's withdrawal from the Moscow-led Comintern amid factional divisions giving rise to the Communist Party). Although Labour commanded a majority share of votes in 1927, it would not manage to establish itself as a party of government before 1935. Its marginalization, in the intervening years, was due to various non-socialist coalitions seeking

to combat the 'communist threat'. Hamsun expressed a general alliance to such anti-communist efforts, especially the Fatherland League (*Fedrelandslaget*), which was founded in 1925 by the politician Christian Michelsen (1857–1925) and the famous polar explorer and ambassador Fritjof Nansen (1861–1930). These were highly respected personages who shared the distinction of being national heroes for their contributions to the dissolution of the Union with Sweden in 1905. Styled as a conservative, nationalist and bourgeois organization acting 'above' party politics, the Fatherland League worked to facilitate non-socialist coalitions against the influence of 'communism' in the Storting (the Norwegian parliament). Their outlook, according to historians Hans Olaf Brevig and Ivo de Figueiredo, was conservative rather than fascist: 'Their strong man was no fascist leader, but a chieftain of the old liberal tradition and an echo of the national unification [*den nasjonale samlingen*] around men like Christian Michelsen and Fritjof Nansen in 1905.'³⁵ In their defence of Norwegian civil liberties, the Fatherland League did not endorse fascist corporatism; and in their defence of the interests of capital, they did not appeal to workers.³⁶

Writing in the Fatherland League's organ, *ABC*, in 1933 Hamsun considered their line as 'right minded', except for their fear of fascism: 'I am not scared to death of fascism, I am more scared of Mowinkel's "parliamentarism" – that of sitting in government despite everything.'³⁷ This was a reference to Johan Ludvig Mowinkel's Liberal Party, who had just brought down the governing Agrarian Party. The outcome of the elections that took place later that year only exacerbated the farce, as Hamsun saw it, when he commented on the situation in an article from January 1934. Mowinkel was still hanging on to power, despite the fact that Labour had won around 40 per cent of the votes: 'At this time', complained Hamsun, 'the Labour Party has – if not mathematically, then a moral right and duty to govern the country. Let us think what we want of this fact, but God knows, a fact it is!'³⁸ The logic of Hamsun's position, here, is that parliamentarism is surely no better than fascism: 'So, this is the advantage of parliamentarism over fascism in Norway', he concludes sarcastically.³⁹

The same article opens with the now ominous sentence, 'Sooner or later fascism will seep into Norway as well', which was hardly an accurate prophesy. Quisling's newly established NS is best characterized, at this time, as a far-right breakaway faction of the Fatherland League which was rapidly being consigned to the lunatic fringe of Norwegian politics. The later prominence of Quisling and NS during the Second World War owed everything to the power politics of Nazi Occupation: in the general elections of 1933 the NS won only 2.2 per cent of the national vote, after which their membership and share of votes went into steady decline.⁴⁰ None of this was apparent in the election of 1933, however, at which point NS probably looked more like the logical consequence and consolidation of the forces associated with the Fatherland League, or else a burgeoning fascist movement. Quisling was, in fact, widely admired in conservative circles on account of his impeccable pedigree as an educated officer, his

background in the 1920s as a military attaché in Russia and Finland, and his association with Nansen's relief work in Russia for the League of Nations – all of which had earned him a reputation as an expert on international affairs, and Russian bolshevism in particular. During Quisling's brief spell as Minister of Defence with the Agrarian Party Government in the early 1930s, it was believed he had ordered troops to suppress an industrial uprising at Norsk Hydro's plant at Menstad in southern Norway, and his reputation as an anti-communist was cemented by a notorious speech delivered in the Storting, where he maintained that 'the revolutionary movement' (i.e. Labour) was financed from Moscow.⁴¹ The Defence Minister's unfounded claims tapped into the fears of conservative nationalists. Indeed, the Agrarian Government to which Quisling belonged received a *takkeadresse* (address of thanks) in response to Quisling's inflammatory speech. Demanding 'an end to the revolutionary and traitorous activities in Norway', the petition was signed by thousands of Norwegian citizens, and headed by 128 figures from the conservative establishment, including Knut Hamsun, whose name appeared alongside land owners, factory owners, ship owners, military leaders, doctors, lawyers, priests and so forth.⁴² Quisling was the only man who had dared to announce 'the danger to the nation for all its people', wrote Hamsun in a separate piece. The press evidently stoked up the fear of revolution: 'I put away the day's papers and await new excesses tomorrow', notes Hamsun; 'Am I living in Norway?'⁴³ He seems, in other words, to believe what he reads, or read what he believes. Hamsun would endorse Quisling again in the elections of 1936, claiming that he would give him 'ten votes' if he could. True only to his own idiosyncrasies, however, Hamsun never actually cast a single vote.⁴⁴ There is a certain comedy in this discrepancy between word and action, but it also indicates a duplicity. What kind of politics, in fact, was Hamsun lending his name to?

The NS programme was a continuation of the ideas Quisling had set out in an obituary from 1930, 'Political Thoughts at Nansen's Death', which argued for a 'new, tightly led and youthful national unification party which could take up the country's forsaken banner'. Nansen's true heritage, argued Quisling, demanded firm rejection of class strife and party politics under a 'strong and just government, one that is not dependent on a capricious majority'.⁴⁵ Refusing to be a 'party politician in a narrow sense', Quisling wrote in *Nationen* in 1933, that there was only one party as far as he was concerned, 'the great party of the Norwegian people'.⁴⁶ Quisling's speeches and articles, says Brevig, were 'vague and unclear' and made 'room for countless interpretations'.⁴⁷ NS was distinct from other parties, however, in its insistence on the superiority of the 'Germanic race', and its authoritarian organization, whereby party leaders were to be appointed by an elite under Quisling, who was now given the title of *Fører* (Leader).⁴⁸ The ideological parallels with Italian-style fascist corporatism were apparent, but never acknowledged by the party itself. The party rallies of NS resembled those in Nazi Germany, complete with the figure of the *Fører*, the processions of flags bearing the St Olav sun cross, and salutes with cries of the purportedly old Norse '*Heil og sæl*', 'Hail and good fortune'.⁴⁹

It is probably true that Hamsun never fell for such 'obligatory tropes of fascism'.⁵⁰ His apologia for the Nazi regime in 1934 was, in any case, highly generalized, not to say unoriginal. As we have seen, he evokes the Treaty of Versailles ('*the whole world's economic, political and moral hostility*') and related upheavals ('revolution, communism, inflation, crisis and attempted coups') in order to 'explain' – and ultimately diminish and excuse – 'the latest bloody drama in Germany'. Apologias of this kind do not require any deeper engagement with Nazi ideology, nor even with the fascist doppelganger Quisling's NS. Hamsun's 'reading' of Nazism or fascism attaches itself, instead, to the *symbolic value* of certain tropes and figures in the general rhetoric of 'national unification'. The brief endorsement of Quisling in 1936 is exemplary in this regard. Hamsun begins by associating Quisling with the national hero Nansen, and goes on to praise Quisling's 'unbending' silence against 'the political uproar that has crawled forth and yelled at him'.⁵¹ Quisling appears to combine, from Hamsun's standpoint, the otherwise incompatible virtues of national unification and solitary opposition to the democratic malaise of the crowd – a critical short-circuit, in other words, attached to the figure of the outsider, stubbornly waiting for the world to reorder itself.

The Occupation Articles

The logic of Hamsun's position, before the Occupation, was that of an apologist for 'foreign affairs', as is illustrated by his refusal in 1935 to sign a petition urging Norway to award the Nobel Peace Prize to a German dissident writer, Carl von Ossietzky. As a journalist, Ossietzky had sought to expose German rearmament, and for this was imprisoned in a concentration camp, where his health was deteriorating. Hamsun's public pronouncements went a great deal further than the kind of argument that would defer to Germany's sovereign right to deal with 'internal affairs'. He actively defended, as he had in 1934, the 'great transition' of Nazism in Germany, and condemned dissent as unpatriotic:

What if Mr Ossietzky instead offered some positive assistance in this great transition, now that the whole world flashes its teeth against the government of that great people to which he belongs?⁵²

Hamsun was immediately condemned – and rightly so – by numerous critics in Norway, who pointed out that he was attacking someone who was defenceless, and whose right to speech had been denied.⁵³ About a month later, the story had evidently been reported beyond Norway's borders since, in Zurich, Thomas Mann wrote to a friend on 16 December 1935: 'The Hamsun-case, or shall I say Hamsun's decline, has upset me too. What incomprehensible crudity!' His 'sympathy for the regime', continues Mann, 'may be partly by his confounding it with Germany in general, for like all great Scandinavians he is deeply indebted to Germany'.⁵⁴ Mann's sense helps us discern, perhaps, another conflation on

Hamsun's part, whereby *responsibility* is reduced to a question of *debt* and *duty*. The trouble became more acute after the German invasion of Norway on 9 April 1940, at the point when a 'foreign affair' became an 'internal affair', and brought the atrocities and persecutions much closer to home.

The trajectory of the Occupation articles can be divided into three different moments, beginning with Hamsun's interventions in the period of upheaval in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, followed by a series of articles supporting the process of Nazification, after which certain misgivings and ambivalences became manifest around 1943. The articles in the initial phase were consistent with the justifications of the occupying force, but did pursue Hamsun's own, somewhat idiosyncratic, interpretation of events. Two articles published shortly after the invasion are notable here: the leaflet 'A Word to Us at the Outbreak of War' published on 14 April 1940, and 'The Nygaardsvold "Government"', a short article printed in the organ of the Agrarian Party, *Nationen*, on 27 April. On the day of the invasion itself, the Norwegian authorities – King Haakon and Johan Nygaardsvold's Labour Government – had escaped Oslo, thus thwarting the German plans of capturing the legitimate authorities and forcing an ultimatum. In the days that followed, the King and Government relocated through the interior of Norway, enabling them to mobilize military resistance while refusing to bestow legitimacy upon alternative governments. Quisling's bid for power, his notorious *coup d'état* on the day of the invasion, was therefore defeated within days, after which an interim caretaker government, the Administrative Council (*Administrasjonsrådet*), was appointed by the Norwegian High Court on 15 April. Hamsun's pamphlet of 14 April was therefore written at a time of uncertainty and confusion. The 'King and the Nygaardsvold Government have removed themselves and their whole administration by leaving their post', he asserted: 'But there is hope the King will return to his country.'⁵⁵ The King, however, continued to affirm the sole legitimacy of Nygaardsvold's Government, and rejected the Administrative Council as unconstitutional.⁵⁶ Hamsun's next article avoided any mention of the King, and sought instead to discredit the legitimacy of the Government:

They gave the order to mobilise and fled. They knew we didn't have any means to save ourselves, but gave orders to mobilise and fled. Now Norwegian youths are dying for 'the Government'.⁵⁷

This line corresponded closely to that of Quisling, whose broadcast to the nation on the day of the invasion declared that Nygaardsvold's Government had 'fled' while issuing a 'criminal' order of mobilization.⁵⁸ As Ingar Sletten Kolloen suggests, Hamsun's closeness to the agendas of the collaborationists and the occupying force was partially due to his reading of the Nazi-controlled press, but also because both the German authorities and the Norwegian collaborators often requested he write on their behalf. In an open letter to King Haakon drafted in early May and intended for publication in *Nationen*,

Hamsun asked the King to consider 'the solution of renouncing the throne'.⁵⁹ For reasons that remain obscure, the piece was never published, possibly because German–Norwegian negotiations remained unresolved, and because attempts were still being made to have the King reinstated.⁶⁰ What the letter illustrates, in any case, is how close Hamsun's position was to the occupying forces. The letter was drafted sometime *before* Reichkommissar Terboven, towards the end of June, pressured the remaining Norwegian parliament into making a formal request for the King's abdication.⁶¹ The King's refusal to do so would subsequently pass into legend as a heroic example of the resistance movement; Hamsun, for his part, was operating with a very different interpretation from the start.

Thus, in the early piece, 'A Word to Us at the Outbreak of War', he rejects the idea that Norway is at war with Germany: 'It is the Western powers who are at war with Germany, we are neutral and shall remain so.'⁶² Hamsun justified the German invasion – as did the Germans – as a defensive move against British infringement that undermined Norway's neutrality. In the run up to the invasion, Britain had indeed breached Norwegian territorial integrity and, in so doing, undermined Norway's claim to neutrality, amid competing claims over the following incident: a German freighter, the *Altmark*, carrying some 300 British prisoners of war had been pursued by the British destroyer *HMS Cossack* into the Jøssing Fjord in south-west Norway, resulting in seven German crew being killed while the British prisoners were liberated. The British justification for breaching Norwegian neutrality, besides the obvious motive of liberating its compatriots, was that Norway's neutrality was already compromised the moment it allowed the *Altmark* to continue its course through Norwegian waters. In addition to this, Germany used Norwegian neutral waters to transport Swedish iron ore (via Narvik and down the Norwegian coast before crossing over to Germany) for its arms industry. The trouble was, however, that the *Altmark* incident threatened to provoke – as events indeed bore out – a German attack on Norway, and it was for this reason that the Norwegian Government, at that point, delivered a formal protest to Britain.⁶³ The sequence of events, and the 'justification' of the German invaders, suited Hamsun's interpretation only too well:

England would prefer to have its war transferred to Norwegian territories. In its uncontrollable barbarism it broke into our neutral land with assaults and murders in the Jøssing Fjord. Since then it has put out mines inside our border and confined us in order to turn Norway into a battlefield. This is what Germany has prevented by pre-emptively arriving to occupy the country.⁶⁴

Although this falls in line with the agenda of the occupying forces, the reference to the 'uncontrollable barbarism' of the British indicates the idiosyncrasy of Hamsun's interpretation. This differed from Quisling's idea, from the early 1930s, of a grand coalition of the peoples of 'Nordic blood' including Great

Britain alongside Scandinavia and Germany.⁶⁵ Not before 1941 did Quisling recast his historical interpretation in line with the promise of a greater Germanic union, in which England was figured as the enemy, now due to 'French' and 'Jewish' influences.⁶⁶ Hamsun's Anglophobia, by contrast, was longstanding rather than pragmatic, and also had a different rationale from that of Quisling. Instead of invoking 'race and blood' in his denunciations of Britain, Hamsun attacked 'England' *as an empire*. 'England', he says, 'will not give up its terror and power on the seas'; 'it wants to starve Germany's women and children by blocking the way for supplies to Germany'.⁶⁷ He proceeds to remind his Norwegian readers of a historical legend: 'Has anyone, incidentally, bothered to give England's most important weapon of war, the hunger blockade, a thought?'⁶⁸ This is a reference to an incident in 1809, during the Napoleonic Wars, when English cruisers blockaded Norwegian waters and cut off communications with Denmark, thereby creating the conditions of famine in Norway, as memorialized in Ibsen's popular epic poem 'Terje Vigen' from 1862: '*Den fattige sultet, den rike led savn*'; 'The poor were starving, the rich suffered want'.⁶⁹ Hamsun's article, in other words, draws a sweeping parallel between the national tragedy of 1809 and all subsequent events. The British mines would thus be designed to 'confine' Norway again, and their attempt to block supplies (for armaments, take note) seen as a malevolent desire 'to starve Germany's women and children'. If England wanted to 'shoot down our towns', he says, 'this would not be in conflict with England's bloody history':

The most recent example before now is the Boer war [1899–1902] when 27,000 women and children were starved to death in English concentration camps, while the men tried to defend their country against the English assault.⁷⁰

This strategy of citing atrocity against atrocity, let us note, is not uncommon today, in the first decade of the twenty-first century. It can be used to justify terrorism as easily as state violence. The point, here, is not to excuse Hamsun by means of relativism, but rather, to point out that such critiques of imperialist violence serve only to justify other kinds of violence. In Hamsun's case, the critique of British imperialism only results in justifications for German ambitions.

Symbolic Appearances

The pattern of the initial moment of Hamsun's war-time articles is characterized not by any engagement with Nazism as an ideology, but rather with the conflict over the rule of Norway. Those conflicts came to an end when the Reichkommissar, Josef Terboven, directly appointed by Hitler, announced the 'New Order' (*Nyordningen*) on 25 September 1940, ushering in new controls

over policing; the banning of all political parties except for NS; press censorship and confiscation of radio sets; and the reorganization of local authorities.⁷¹ Only a few days after the New Order was announced, Hamsun urged that Quisling – with ‘his administrative ideas’ – should be allowed to ‘take power immediately’.⁷² Without saying so directly, he was throwing his weight behind the *Fører* principle and the corporative state. The New Order handed to Quisling the opportunity to erect and extend the influence of NS in Norway, with German support – but he was distrusted by the Reichkommissar on account of his lack of political clout and failure to build a strong NS in the 1930s.

The powers of the NS were limited; although the party did increase its membership, and did reorganize local authorities, their failure to win popular support in Norway was evident as early as November 1940 when they sought to re-organize all voluntary organizations in line with the New Order, but were stubbornly boycotted by the sports community. For the remainder of the Occupation, only a few sportsmen would participate in official arrangements, while audiences mostly stayed away.⁷³ Quisling’s appointment as ‘Minister President’ in February 1942 was seen, within NS, as a step towards Norwegian independence, since the position involved taking over certain legislative powers of the Storting. But the Minister President was still subordinate to the Reichkommissar who, in accordance with the Führer principle, was himself following directives from Hitler.

As an author and national figure, Hamsun’s influence on events was of little or no practical significance. That he nonetheless attempted to exert some influence is clear from the articles he wrote before the imposition of the New Order relegated him to the function of upholding symbolic appearances. Under the New Order, Hamsun was more resigned in his tone, now tending to figure Norway’s new future as a historical inevitability. The present course, he argued in a radio interview subsequently printed in *Aftenposten*, on 24 January 1941, was just as inevitable as Norwegian independence had been in 1905. Anyone who thought the New Order was in breach with constitutional law had simply misunderstood the order of things: ‘As if the law comes before life? No, it is life that changes the laws.’ It is useless to ‘protest against time’ he would maintain: ‘We must accept the conditions as they are today. This is not only wise, it is Norway’s salvation.’⁷⁴

Although Hamsun later claimed that he never signed up as party member, he did take part in a broader campaign orchestrated by the NS, wherein various personages were asked ‘why they became a member of NS, and what are the opportunities for Norway after the New Order within a European cooperative under Germany’s leadership’. The article was therefore entitled ‘Why I Became a Member of NS’ in several papers in Norway, Sweden and Denmark in 1941. Hamsun opened only with a brief statement in support of Quisling, before moving swiftly on to the question regarding the New Order: ‘Germany has given us a promise of undivided respect for our national freedom. It’s as good as an oath.’⁷⁵ The condition, he continues, is that ‘a unified Norway’ must ‘join

the league of European states under National Socialist leadership'.⁷⁶ Hamsun's references to National Socialism as an *ideal* in this article are in fact so unusual it deserves some attention. Let us also note how far removed this seems from the sardonic, mocking voice that often envelops Hamsun's polemical writings; how far removed it is – to recall another misleading trope – from Nagel's interior diatribe about 'the great terrorist' in *Mysterier*. Those associations bear little or no resemblance to the measured utilitarianism Hamsun now associates with National Socialism, along with sentimental promises of inclusiveness, peace and prosperity:

We are to live life in peaceful companionship with all people, work alongside them, exchange goods, art and intellectual ideas, bring about mutual development; engage in a system of aid – in short, National Socialism. The system will be open for the whole world; no one is excluded. Even the lagging people of Europe can join when they finally wake up. England and Russia can join, yes, even America can join when it wakes up. It would then amount to world socialism, but upon each country's national ground. This is how I have understood it, more or less. There is written so much and by so many about our future. But most of all Hitler has spoken to my heart.⁷⁷

The notion that 'no one is excluded' from the 'open' system of National Socialism is fallacious to say the least, but Hamsun does not display hypocrisy or duplicity, here, so much as his willing capitulation to the power of symbolic appearances. As such, he obliges himself to support the subjugations and sacrifices of war. Indeed, Hamsun would pay tribute, less than two months later, to the Norwegian Legion (another troubled NS initiative designed to win German approval), describing them as 'our fine young boys who are going in on the German side in the great battle' on the Eastern Front.⁷⁸

Hamsun's willingness to lend his name to various initiatives orchestrated by the NS and the Reichkommissariat, however, also meant that his name was used in ways beyond his control. In January 1941, for instance, *Aftenposten* published photographs of Hamsun and Terboven, in which the two men were said to have engaged in a jovial conversation at the Reichkommissar's residence. Tore Hamsun, who accompanied his father as a translator on this occasion, later disputed the propaganda: Hamsun had sought an audience with Terboven in an attempt to persuade him to release Ronald Fangen, a Norwegian author imprisoned for dissent. The photographs of Hamsun and Terboven were taken without Hamsun's prior knowledge, and came as an unwelcome surprise, whereupon Terboven proceeded to read long passages from a document detailing Fangen's anti-German polemics, provoking an increasingly 'impatient and distraught' Hamsun to demand 'a straightforward answer, yes or no'.⁷⁹ The answer was no. Tore Hamsun emphasizes his father's frustration and the fact that he never approached Terboven again, whereas Terboven privately maintained that

Hamsun, on hearing the details of Fangen's case, 'distanced himself' from Fangen 'in the most unambiguous manner'.⁸⁰ Hamsun's fabled meeting with Hitler in his Berghof residence in Oberzalsberg in June 1943 tells a similar story. According to a transcript of the meeting taken by Hitler's translator, Hamsun politely brushed questions of literature to one side and took the opportunity, instead, to complain about the harsh repression of resistance fighters in Norway, especially the executions of young resistance soldiers ordered by Terboven, whom Hamsun wanted removed. Hamsun, who was virtually deaf and reliant on a translator, also kept interrupting Hitler's evasive monologues on the administration of Norway and international politics, demanding action instead of endless deferrals on the question of Norwegian independence. At that, however, the Führer was offended and is said to have risen abruptly, brought the meeting to a close and thereupon, after Hamsun had been shown out, raged at his translator declaring that he never wanted to meet such people again.⁸¹ The heated exchange itself was hushed up, and when Hamsun returned to Norway, the PR-minded Terboven was once again awaiting his arrival for another photo opportunity.⁸²

Resistances

Hamsun's evident misgivings with the occupying forces never translated into public criticism. Resistance and civil disobedience, in the meantime, were widespread in Norway, especially in response to the Nazification of voluntary organizations and the appointment of Quisling as Minister President. Sabotage and espionage were increasingly countered with harsh repression and executions. Only two people were executed during the first year of the Occupation; this figure rose to 35 in 1941, and increased to 212 the following year, causing widespread revulsion not only among the population at large, but also within NS. When it was announced that 10 young men from Kristiansand in southern Norway were to be executed for resistance activities on 27 January 1943, a number of prominent NS members approached Terboven with pleas for clemency. Hamsun too contributed to this by writing '*Nu Igjen – !*' ('Now Again – !'), an article that appeared in several national papers in February. On this occasion, the campaign worked, since the death sentences were transferred to life imprisonment later that month.⁸³ Hamsun's article was nonetheless provocative, and has elicited contradictory and ambivalent responses ever since. His articles always caused 'violent indignation', writes Sten Sparre Nilson in retrospect: 'we expected terrible things and rushed only with reluctance through the text, before pushing the newspaper away.'⁸⁴ Another contemporary, Sigurd Hoel, wrote in 1952 that Hamsun's article was 'monumental in its heartlessness', but revised this line to 'monumental of its kind' three years later, noting that 'Hamsun quietly did what he could to save the lives of the thirteen [*sic*]

condemned to death.’⁸⁵ This somewhat ambivalent revision testifies, above all perhaps, to the contradictory effects of Hamsun’s article, which opens as follows:

Time after time arrive prayers for help in seeking mercy for those sentenced to death. It is parents and relatives who write, and it is without exception young people who are condemned, and who are now to die. What have they done? We all know: They have worked for England. . . . These are English minded people – and that’s their affair! They believe in England’s victory and want to aid it – and that’s their affair too!⁸⁶

The repeated phrase – ‘*Dem om det!*’, ‘That’s their affair!’ or ‘Each to their own!’ – was read as a callous statement, says Nilson, because it appeared to relegate the victims to their own fate, without solidarity. But this was a ‘bad misreading’, he later decided, because it overlooked the sense that Hamsun did acknowledge the views of others. The article is ‘in itself a small work of art’, says Nilson, because it exhibits both ‘despair’ and ‘human empathy’, especially in the moving, indeed daring, lines that conclude the article.⁸⁷ Here, then, is Hamsun:

It is painful [*Det gjør ikke godt*] to receive letters from parents and relatives about the unfortunate ones who now are sentenced and who shall die. It is youth, the hope of youth that here is lost, it is so sad, as anyone can imagine by themselves and amongst each other. These letters now again, these are outstretched hands and pleas for clemency.⁸⁸

Nilson and his contemporaries probably never ‘misread’ the article, however, since it issues blame upon the resistance movement as assuredly as it displays painful regret, take note, of *young* resistance soldiers condemned to death. A ‘work of art’ needn’t proceed from empathy alone. Opening on a note of *accusation*, Hamsun excuses the youngsters for their actions on account of their immaturity, while emphasizing that the older conspirators ‘have acted beyond all reason and all responsibility’ – ‘they are guilty for themselves and everyone else’.⁸⁹ This calls to mind the kind of threats Terboven used to issue when, for instance, he warned that any strike action among Norwegian teachers ‘can only bring disaster for the parties concerned and for common people’.⁹⁰ In her biography of Terboven, Berit Nøkleby shows how the Reichkommissar countered the resistance by picking holes in their arguments amid a general atmosphere of menace. It is hardly any wonder, therefore, that readers were so deeply wounded when Hamsun, in turn, argued that the ‘English minded’ were being counterproductive on their own terms:

They want to help England – good, that’s their affair! But they can’t help England by extinguishing themselves. They think England will win – fine! But

why then expose themselves to reckless risk in advance? For it turns out to be of no use, and turns out to be death. . . . They should just wait. Live their quiet life, tend to their daily tasks . . . and just wait.⁹¹

It has been argued that Hamsun exhibited a tolerance towards resistance that was 'uncommon' in 1943,⁹² but this ignores, rather conveniently, the coercive context within which his rhetoric, while exhibiting the author's ambivalence, nevertheless serves the interests of the occupying forces. If the phrase '*Dem om det!*' respects the other's right to difference and dissent, it does so only on the condition that this difference remains *private*. It urges 'quiet' in the name of saving lives and, in so doing, rejects *public* resistance. Hamsun's '*Dem om det!*', in this regard, falls in line with a tacit understanding of the German authorities. The Reichkommisariat knew it was impossible to win the hearts and minds of the Norwegian majority, but worked to maintain the façade of German power in the *public* realm, where the impudence of ordinary citizens, their symbolic acts of passive resistance, was not to be tolerated.⁹³ '*Nu Igjen – !*' was certainly concerned with saving lives, but also propped up the symbolic appearance of German power. Whatever his private torment and misgivings, Hamsun would obey that code of loyalty to the bitter end, right up to his notorious obituary to Hitler, printed in *Aftenposten* on 7 May 1945, the day before the Germans capitulated in Norway.

Conclusion

No apologia or condemnation, however ingenious the defence or damning the indictment, has ever been able to diminish or eradicate the violent provocation of Hamsun's polemical writings. As an articulation of a 'political project', the articles were sporadic and linked to specific events, exchanges or obligations, and consistent always in their *nationalist* stance. Nationalism is not a concept Hamsun ever discusses as such; it operates, instead as the underlying assumption of his rhetoric, without which references to 'Nansen', 'Quisling' and 'Hitler' will seem as baffling as they are provocative. However unpalatable, the internal consistency relates always to the nation: the national independence of 1905, the Fatherland League, National Union (NS), the German 'promise of undivided respect for our national freedom', National Socialism 'upon each country's national ground', and finally the figure of Hitler: 'a prophet of the gospel of justice for all nations'.⁹⁴

But did Hamsun, in all seriousness, ever read Hitler? The statement from 1942 – 'Hitler has spoken to my heart' – indicates no reading of whatever Hitler said or wrote, but rather, a symbolic gesture in the code of honour, as if to forever affirm certain debts and certain promises. As a 'great author', Hamsun was indebted to Germany; from Hitler, in turn, came the promise of national independence. That promise was always deferred while Hamsun's rhetoric, in

spite of so many misgivings and upheavals, upheld a code of loyalty. Of the obituary to Hitler – which ends with the line ‘we, his close followers, now bow our heads at his death’ – Hamsun reportedly told his son, ‘*Det var en ridderlighet, intet annet*’, ‘It was a piece of chivalry, nothing else.’⁹⁵ If we take this literally, the figures of personal closeness (‘my heart’, ‘his close followers’) would be inscribed in the imagery of knights errant, in which Nazism was anyway steeped, in its general hotchpotch of traditional borrowings. Hamsun’s adherence to the code, bound by Germany’s ‘oath’ to Norway, does not excuse anything. It is the very opposite of responsibility.

‘The mainstay of the National Socialist program’, Hitler told the Reichstag in 1937, ‘is to abolish the liberal concept of the individual and the Marxist concept of humanity and to replace them with the concept of the *Volk*, rooted in the soil and bound together in blood’.⁹⁶ This rhetoric also entails the inscription of a bond, contract or code, but is articulated through the visceral and racist figures of ‘blood’ and ‘soil’. As I have shown elsewhere in this book, the figure of ‘blood’ in Hamsun’s writings was much less concerned with biology and racial purity than the problem of national identity amid the conflicted legacies of nation building and the lingering traces of migration and displacement. No overt or implicit rhetoric of national rootedness, including Hamsun’s own, would ever be reconciled with those traces and fragments, the foreign bodies of migration, that everywhere animate his literary works, most obviously in the ambivalent figure of the rootless wanderer. Rosenberg and Heidegger’s commentaries, in this regard, illustrate the complex ways by which ruptures within the Nazi movement found resonance in the very ruptures of Hamsun’s literary works, and how the Nazi myth, as mimetic will-to-identity and self-fulfilment of form, sought only to overcome, or erase, those ruptures. It is necessary to condemn Hamsun’s indefensible stance, but also to reflect upon the irresponsibility of obeying only programmatic codes. As indeed Derrida says, ‘one must guard against reproducing the logic one claims to condemn’.⁹⁷

Chapter 7

Treacherous Testimony: *On Overgrown Paths* and the Rhetoric of Deafness

But isn't everything Comedy and Humbug and Deceit?

Nagel, *Mysteries*¹

A declaration of truth or fact appears, by definition, to rule out creative invention and literary fiction. As Jacques Derrida observes in *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, 'the classical concept of attestation, like that of autobiography, seems by law to exclude both fiction and art, as soon as the truth, all the truth and nothing but the truth, is owing.'² This prescribes, very accurately, what bedevils all 'hearings' of the Hamsun case. *On Overgrown Paths* (*Paa gjengrodde Stier*, 1949) is an account of the legal process against Hamsun after the Second World War, and is very obviously autobiographical – yet it draws no secure border between *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, poetry and life. The text itself is framed, from beginning to end, by the factual chronology of the legal case, and opens by attesting to the prosaic details: 'The year is 1945. On the 26 of May the Arendal chief of police proclaimed house arrest for myself and my wife for thirty days.'³ Recounted thereafter, in the mode of autobiography, are the impressions and experiences of the first person narrator, as a suspect interviewed by the police, as a detainee in a hospital, as a resident in a retirement home, as a patient committed to Oslo Psychiatric Clinic, and as a defendant delivering his speech during the court hearings. As if to reinforce its 'documentary' character, the text also reproduces two testimonials pertaining to the history of the legal process; a letter of complaint Hamsun sent to the Attorney General regarding his committal to the Psychiatric Clinic; and a transcription of the speech he delivered at Grimstad District Court on 16 December 1947. The book's final lines mark the conclusion of the case, while omitting to explain or comment on its precise outcomes: 'Midsummer Day 1948. Today the Supreme Court has passed judgement, and I end my writing.'⁴ The end reiterates a silence, or blunt refusal, to testify on the terms posterity will demand. It marks a certain excess as well, since the 'end of my writing' entails a number of 'ends'. Writing its own end, the end of the writer's writing serves to end the book, the testimony and, in a monumental sense, the authorship. The book continually

resists autobiographical confession while also, however, *exceeding* the chronological, 'factual' frame by means of digressions, meanderings through the minutiae of everyday life, incidental walks into forests or hillside tracks, and recollections of voices from other times and places. Troubling factual verification, the digressive recollections often assume the form of creative extrapolations, or fictions, which recall – through the literary signature, the style and composition, the recurrence of certain motifs and figures – a body of work, Hamsun's oeuvre, which is itself already marked by the creative tensions of autobiography and fiction. *On Overgrown Paths*, then, is not just the signatory's testimony of facts and experiences, but also an uncanny testimony of the literary signature. And what is Hamsun's literary signature if not one that always refuses to write a unified 'I', and which always entails tropes and re-turns of displacement, splitting and doubling?

The implications are as complex as they are troubling. 'Literature' and 'fiction' would easily *resist* truthful testimony and, at the same time, evade certain facts by way of fictional excess, perjury and deceit. The central claim of this chapter, however, is that *On Overgrown Paths* is treacherous in ways yet to be understood, yet to be read with an ear to the problems it raises. The problem, here, is not simply one of verification and refutation, of separating facts from fictions, but also of reflecting upon the complex rhetorical coimplications of testimony and fiction, which open up the aberrations of rhetoric in general.

Still, I wish to read *On Overgrown Paths* with an ear to what posterity demands, while also listening to what the text itself demands on its 'literary' terms. The two are not always compatible, and one discovers here a complex structure of supplemental inscriptions. The text itself, first of all, might be described as a polyphony of three different 'voices', the first of which would be that of the defendant, marked by obstinate pride and exasperated helplessness; the second voice, which throws the first one into considerable relief (while also troubling the chronology of facts), is the digressive, more 'fictional' one, forming a strange testimony to the work of literary invention as such; the third voice, which in some sense grows out of the other two, coincides with them, and finally traverses them in a way that overgrows and covers over them, proceeds from what I call *the rhetoric of deafness*, the repeated figurations of failed or severed communication, the moments of solitary torment, and the exasperated refusal to deliver the explanations that posterity demands. Hamsun's text repeatedly describes disjunctions of deafness and hearing, which is difficult to hear if one only subjects this text to endless 'hearings', without listening to what the narrator, who is himself hard of hearing, still 'hears'. The rhetoric of deafness does not simply concern recurring figures and tropes within the text, but the disjunctions of *deafness* and *hearing* throughout the legal process as well, and the demands of posterity too. To account for this, my reading will proceed through three other supplemental moments of *contextual* inscription: first, the historical background of the legal judgement of Hamsun; second, the controversy that followed in the postwar era and beyond; and third, the 'overgrown paths' of

Hamsun's oeuvre, the sense by which *On Overgrown Paths*, despite everything, is so strangely apt – so disturbingly pertinent – coming as it does as the uncanny return of a certain literary oeuvre.

The Legal Case

Testimony, in its classical sense, concerns 'personal or documentary evidence or attestation in support of a fact or statement' (*OED*). As testimony, *On Overgrown Paths* is both factual and personal and, hence, partial and subjective. It tends to emphasize the injustices of the psychiatric observation while subordinating, if not silencing altogether, the details of Hamsun's political statements in the past, the charges brought against him, and also the nature of the verdict. This is not exactly apologia, although it has certainly lent itself to the apologies of posterity. My previous chapter shows how Hamsun took up a position in the Norwegian public sphere during the 1930s as an apologist for 'foreign affairs'. In polemical opposition to the critical consensus in the Norwegian press, Hamsun aligned himself with apologists for German 'internal affairs': Hitler's 1934 'blood purge' within the NSDAP and, in 1935, the persecution of the dissident writer, Carl von Ossietzky. Hamsun's views also paralleled those of the anti-parliamentarist and fearful anti-communist movements in Norway during the 1920s and 1930s, the general contexts from which Quisling's marginal fascist movement eventually emerged. On the question of anti-Semitism which, more than anything else, has come to define the overwhelming deadliness of Nazism, one should neither diminish Hamsun's culpability nor exaggerate the role anti-Semitism played in his political stance. The great enemies of the twentieth century, for Hamsun at any rate, were British imperialism, American industrialism and Russian bolshevism, and it was with such convictions that he publicly supported the German Occupation of Norway in 1940, arguing that Germany would 'protect' Norway's neutrality from British infringements. His opposition to British imperialism was a critical stance that, in its polemical rigidity, actively disavowed or turned a deaf ear to the imperialist violence of Germany. During the Occupation, however, he was no longer an apologist for Nazi violence as a 'foreign affair' because this was now increasingly an 'internal affair' within Norway, where the executions of Norwegian resistance soldiers became impossible to ignore. Whichever way one reads Hamsun's interventions here, he continued to maintain his indefensible public support of the Nazis, and did not publicly relent nor admit to any errors of judgement after the war.

He was arrested and charged, not long after the Liberation of Norway in 1945, for supporting, in the language of Norwegian criminal law, the enemy '*i råd og dåd*', 'in word and deed'. There was nothing 'criminal', legally speaking, about his political views, nor his early apologies for Nazi brutality in the 1930s. The crime, here, concerned his public alignment with the 'enemy'.

He was charged, accordingly, with being a member of Quisling's *Nasjonal Samling* (NS); with writing propaganda articles against the King and Government; with publicly supporting the illegal government of NS and the Germans; and, moreover, with encouraging desertions in his articles calling for Norwegian soldiers and seamen to cease resistance against the German forces.⁵ The criminal charges, however, were dropped the following year in 1946. The ageing author had been committed, since October 1945, to the Psychiatric Clinic in Oslo, as it was feared – or hoped – that the ailments of old age might leave him unfit to stand trial. For Hamsun suffered from arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), which led to two instances of cerebral haemorrhage (stroke) during the Occupation, which in turn led to aphasia (a difficulty with speech and writing). These ailments came on top of his deafness; the problem of *speaking* and *hearing*, therefore, would haunt the case from the outset. After several months of psychiatric observation, amid press speculation that Hamsun was senile, the psychiatric experts, Gabriel Langfeldt and Arnulf Ødegård, concluded their patient was not 'mentally ill' or 'insane', but rather, 'a person of permanently impaired mental faculties'.⁶ The Attorney General, Sven Arntzen, who ordered the psychiatric assessment, then declared that there was 'no public interest' in pursuing the criminal charges, and that the case would be passed on to The War Liability Directorate.⁷ Thus, although the *criminal* charges were dropped, Hamsun was still liable to pay *civil* compensation. This was in accordance with the Treason Edict of 1944, drafted by the Government in exile, which stipulated that all members of Quisling's NS – some 40,000 Norwegian citizens – would compensate the nation for the damages caused by collaboration.

The legal case against Hamsun, therefore, came to hinge upon the prosaic technicality of whether he was a fully paid-up and consenting party member, something the defendant adamantly denied. According to the evidence, he had been registered as a member of NS since 1940 but, since the register was considered unreliable, Grimstad District Court accepted that Hamsun had not applied for membership and was thereby not responsible for being registered at that point. In 1942, however, NS had issued a questionnaire to members asking for their date of enrolment, which Hamsun did answer, albeit in his usual idiosyncratic fashion: 'Have not been enrolled, but I have belonged to Quisling's Party'.⁸ This proclamation of ideological loyalty, the defence insisted, did not confirm party membership as such (despite the rather compromising fact that Hamsun answered a questionnaire *for members*, and did not express any intention to remain a non-member). The court, for its part, ruled that Hamsun was *de facto* a member: he wrote numerous articles in support of Quisling; he was regarded by NS members, as well as the Norwegian public at large, as a party member; and he was often seen wearing an NS badge during the Occupation years. In Judge Bjarte Randers Rognlien's summary, Hamsun was judged as *socially* responsible, even as *social isolation* was accepted in mitigation:

I emphasise, on the one hand, in particular that, as aggravating circumstances, it must weigh heavily that Knut Hamsun supported the enemy's

propaganda with his whole position and authority as a world famous poet and that his conduct, as a result, represented a much greater danger to the country than the conduct of even very active [NS] members could achieve. On the other hand, it has to be admitted that Hamsun's physical and mental peculiarities and defects and the isolation caused by these circumstances can, with justification, be invoked as substantial mitigating circumstances.⁹

The final ruling of the Supreme Court in June 1947 sentenced Hamsun to pay 325,000 kroner in compensation to the Norwegian State, the lion's share of his estimated fortune set at 400,000 kroner.¹⁰

The legal process and its outcomes have been the subject of much controversy, often confused and frustrated by the sense that several issues were fudged on both sides. I shall proceed, however, with two simple observations, namely, that the judgement summary turned a deaf ear to the speech Hamsun delivered in Grimstad District Court on 16 December 1947, while the speech itself, in any case, was addressed to the ears of posterity. Hamsun re-inscribed his speech as part of *On Overgrown Paths* and, in so doing, displaced it from the context described above – effectively turning a deaf ear to the deaf ears turned against him in the judgement summary.

The Court Address

The central claim of the speech was that Hamsun was a law-abiding citizen who hadn't committed any crimes during the Occupation, had never been a member of Quisling's NS,¹¹ and had acted mostly in isolation – alone in the solitary confinement of deafness – but with the honourable conviction that his articles might deter what he saw as the pointless waste of lives involved in the armed resistance against the Germans: 'I wrote', says Hamsun, 'to prevent Norwegian youths and men from acting foolishly and provocatively towards the occupying power, to no avail whatsoever, bringing only ruin and death to themselves'.¹² Although this was consistent with the defence, Hamsun would nevertheless maintain, unequivocally, that his speech was *not* a defence: 'I do not defend myself in any way.'¹³ Neither was it heard as a convincing defence; the judgement accepted as mitigating circumstances only the idea that Hamsun was isolated. The ears hearing this, however, were evidently plugged up by the psychiatric report, as the judge's reference to 'mental peculiarities and defects' suggests. Overall, the conclusions of the judgement imply that Hamsun failed to comprehend his *social* responsibility, precisely because he was socially isolated. As such, the judgement tends to uphold the myth of the isolated artist (impaired or otherwise), while troubling that myth by means of the premise of social responsibility upon which the ruling is based. From one deaf ear to another, moreover, Hamsun's court address has also confirmed for many the myth of the artist's isolation, although I shall argue that the speech itself obscurely undermines the myth it otherwise upholds.

In a general sense, it might be said that the speech dissociates the defendant from any specific *institutional* entanglements with NS and the German authorities. Hamsun gives no specific account, for example, of the circumstances behind the articles that were so closely coordinated with the propaganda initiatives of NS and the German authorities. There is also a more general silence, here, about the author's family members, who were all publicly committed party members. The rhetorical *movements* of the speech, however, trouble the logic of dissociation and isolation. The defendant presents himself, initially, as someone who never quite got to grips with Nazi ideology, but who may have been infected nevertheless:

I have tried to understand what NS was about, I tried to get to the bottom of it, but it didn't come to anything. But it may well be that I wrote in the spirit of NS now and then. I don't know because I don't know what the spirit of NS is. But it may well be that I have written in the spirit of NS, that something could have seeped into me from the newspapers I read.¹⁴

By leaving the 'spirit' of NS undefined and undecided, the passage pulls in opposite directions, on the one hand, away from the problem of institutional implication and complicity but, on the other, straight back into acknowledging the possibility of contamination, unbeknownst to himself. The solitary writer, in other words, is not so solitary after all, as he is always in the company of the writings of others: 'I had nothing to go by except my two newspapers, *Aftenposten* and *Fritt Folk*', he says later, again displacing complicity as much as he makes it apparent, since the conservative daily *Aftenposten* was under Nazi censorship, and thus compromised, while the reference to *Fritt Folk*, however, completely undermines any suggestion of innocent ignorance, since this was the vociferous propaganda organ of the NS.¹⁵ The defendant offers, in this context, some 'information' about 'myself', while immediately turning to an unspecified collective 'we':

We were given the impression that Norway would have a high, a prominent place in the greater Germanic world community, which was now burgeoning, and which we all believed in, more or less, but everyone believed in it. I believed in it, that's why I wrote as I did.¹⁶

'We were given the impression', 'everyone believed', and 'I believed', he says, suggesting he was carried along or even deceived alongside this collective. From here, the rhetorical movement pulls back from the collective to the individual defendant, and now turns itself *against* another collective, the one before which Hamsun stands accused, and towards whom he now issues a counteraccusation: 'nobody told me it was wrong, what I sat and wrote, nobody in the entire country.'¹⁷ That claim was false, and was refuted by other testimonials in court; in the book, however, it stands unchallenged. Nobody told him he was wrong,

he maintains, after which, he basically asserts that it wouldn't have mattered anyway: 'It was not wrong when I wrote it. It was right, and what I wrote was right.'¹⁸ The solitary 'I' then sends another counteraccusation towards the collective of accusers on the ground that they do not understand his conflicted interactions with two other collectives, the victims of Nazi oppression, and the Nazi authorities. The picture that emerges, then, is of this 'I' caught up between incompatible demands, which I underscore here by the addition of several emphases:

Those who gloat over me now because *they* have been victorious, victorious on the face of it, superficially; *they* have not like *me* been visited by families, from the smallest on up, who came crying for *their* fathers, *their* sons and *their* brothers who were incarcerated in one barbed-wire camp or another and were now – sentenced to death. Yes, were now sentenced to death. Now, *I* had no power, but *they* came to *me*. *I* had no power at all, but *I* sent telegrams. *I* turned to *Hitler* and to *Terboven*. [. . .] And it was those telegrams in the end that made *the Germans* a little suspicious of *me*. *They* regarded *me* as a sort of mediator, a slightly unreliable mediator *they* had better keep an eye on. Hitler excused *himself* from receiving *my* appeals. *He* was fed up with them. *He* referred *me* to *Terboven*, but *Terboven* didn't answer *me*.¹⁹

From the general turmoil thus evoked, the speech falls back to the solitary, brooding individual, 'carried away' and 'possessed', he now says, by the ideas he believes in 'even today' – 'Norway, an upright and shining land out on the periphery of Europe!'²⁰ However fanatical this exclamation might seem, it also forms an uncanny double for the collective of accusers who were, themselves, busy re-establishing national independence of a non-fascist, social democratic kind, by the symbolic expulsion of traitors, quislings and collaborators. The tragic apex of the speech then follows, going back to the early stages of the Occupation, before positions had become so clearly defined:

But what I was doing went awry; it went awry. Quite soon I found myself confused, and my deepest confusion began when the King and his government voluntarily left the country and put themselves out of action here at home. It swept the ground from under my feet. I was suspended between heaven and earth. I had nothing definite to go by any more. So I sat and wrote, sat and telegraphed, and brooded.²¹

One might be moved by this admission of helplessness, but also provoked, since the murmurs of an older counteraccusation against the King and Government are still very much intact. At no point does Hamsun permit the violent invasion of the Nazis to trouble his version of events, about the 'voluntary' exile of the Norwegian authorities. Not once does he lend an ear to the torment of the other side, those who were also caught up in circumstances beyond their control.

Hamsun's exhibition of torment, alongside his refusal to apologize, let alone account, for his political entanglements, would haunt all subsequent debates, torn between sympathy and outrage. It is to this history I now turn, in order to trace the vicissitudes of the problem of testimony and fiction, which are not simply limited to the workings of *On Overgrown Paths*, but to the overgrown inscriptions in the postwar era and beyond.

Testimony and Fiction

The court address had both an immediate and a long-term effect on the perception of the affair. There was enormous media interest in the case, Tore Stuberg observes, as Hamsun's court appearance was featured on the front pages of all the national papers. Dwelling on the pathetic spectacle of a doddering old gentleman struggling to sustain his dignity, the headlines figured the case as the personal 'tragedy' of a once great national literary figure.²² Oskar Hasselknippe, reporter for the national daily *Verdens Gang*, characterized the author as a 'blundering giant' whose 'booming defence speech' had 'sentences and paragraphs possessed of a dramatic magnitude similar to those newspaper articles and sentences that the Germans so cleverly used in their propaganda'. This was not proof that Hamsun could be held responsible argued Hasselknippe, on the contrary, it was proof that 'he must also have blundered during the war and cannot be morally judged as a responsible person'.²³ Even before the publication of *On Overgrown Paths*, the normative separation of 'fiction' and 'testimony' was strongly operative. To liken the 'dramatic magnitude' of Hamsun's speech to 'propaganda' is also to figure it as a seductive 'fiction'. But listen again: isn't the case itself now turned into another kind of 'fiction', through the references to 'tragedy' and the figure of the 'blundering giant', which recalls fairy tales of trolls and the like?

Upon its publication in 1949, the most obvious effect of *On Overgrown Paths* was its defiance towards the consensus that the author was mentally impaired. To this, however, came another kind of torment, as contemporary critics were angered by the failure or refusal of this text to testify on the terms expected in the public domain. And yet, many also welcomed the book as testimony to the enduring appeal, and unexpected survival, of Hamsun's literary imagination. Torn between celebrating his unique prose style and condemning the author for treacherous Nazism, the critic Philip Houm wrote in the national paper *Dagbladet*: 'But one might as well admit it straight away, it was difficult to dream that so much of the Hamsunian spirit and the Hamsunian style would be preserved in the ninety-year-old author.'²⁴ A different reviewer, Haakon Odd Christiansen, also expressed wonderment over the survival of *den Hamsunske stil*, the Hamsunian style, but asserted that 'it is not the artistic aspect of the book that interests us, but the moral one.' And, on that account, *On Overgrown Paths* makes for 'trist lesning', 'dismal reading': 'Dismal because the Occupation

years with their hard and healthy lessons for us do not seem to have taught Hamsun anything.²⁵

One recalls, here, the famous dictum of Theodor Adorno: 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.'²⁶ A similar kind of outrage attends to the Hamsun affair, not least since the initial focus on *treason* would, by stages, be supplanted by a sharpened awareness of the terrifying nature of Nazi atrocities throughout Europe. An editorial from *Verdens Gang*, 4 August 1955, may serve as an illustration of this shift:

Nazism was first and foremost violence, brutality and vileness; terror and torture; Gestapo and concentration camps; incarceration and denial of legal rights; racial hatred, war-madness and mass murder. If Hamsun had understood this, his attitudes would not just be treachery against Norway, but also against all cultural and human values.²⁷

Raising the tricky question over what, or how much, Hamsun knew or 'understood' about Nazi atrocities before and during the Occupation, the editorial immediately capitulates to the critical stupor legitimized by the psychiatric report. Condemnation, here, coincides with apologia: If Hamsun did not understand the deadliness of Nazism, the editorial declares, there can be no 'other explanation than that he suffered from "permanently impaired mental faculties"'. It is easy to see why the diagnosis was always a little too convenient, but a great deal more difficult to acknowledge that Hamsun's support for Nazism also entails the trouble of undecidable culpabilities. The pretence of absolute knowledge, where everything about Nazism is known, always already 'understood', actively denies the troubling possibilities of gaps, schisms, disavowals, misreadings. The ongoing controversy, in the meantime, takes flight from this via so many other evasive stratagems. For instance, the psychiatric diagnosis alone produces deafening debates; it has been rejected on medical grounds, since the report did not pinpoint any cognitive impairment to support the diagnosis it issued,²⁸ and on ethical grounds, ranging from criticisms over the humiliating treatment Hamsun had to endure in the psychiatric clinic, to the fact that the diagnosis seemed to absolve everyone concerned – the author for his political alignments, and his readers for their troubled but surviving admiration.²⁹ The psychiatric diagnosis was initially mobilized to rehabilitate Hamsun's name in postwar Norway, observes Stuberg, but was soon displaced by the stratagems of New Criticism, wishing only to hear the 'poet', and not the 'politician'.³⁰ There are several ways, in other words, to plug up one's ears.

The conflicting interests and ethico-political dilemmas of the postwar era thus *massively* overdetermine all 'hearings' of *On Overgrown Paths*. A recurring strand throughout is nevertheless the troubling presence of literary style, poetic licence and fictional invention *within* what ought to be a discourse of fact, truth and testimony. Thorkild Hansen's novelistic biography *Prosessen mot*

Hamsun (The Trial of Hamsun) from 1978 represents another twist in this story. Essentially an amplified re-inscription of Hamsun's own 'defence by counteraccusation', Hansen's biography is a damning indictment of the legal proceedings and the psychiatric observation, which firmly rejects the psychiatric diagnosis while adamantly insisting upon Hamsun's noble intentions to save condemned resistance soldiers.³¹ The book also pursues an exasperatingly banal agenda littered with literary clichés of how (cue Romanticism) the great poet, the genius, the outsider was horribly victimized after the Occupation by (cue Kafka) 'Prosessen', 'Der Prozess', 'The Trial' and not least by (cue Ibsen) 'den kompakte majoritet', 'the compact majority'. The overriding effect is the displacement of Hamsun's culpabilities onto others: the Norwegian authorities, the establishment, the intelligentsia, not to mention Hamsun's wife, colleagues and friends. But Hansen's biography is also peculiarly 'Hamsunian', as it cleverly incorporates themes and styles that call to mind novels such as *Growth of the Soil*, using similar narrative techniques such as direct and free indirect discourse to describe the inner thoughts and justifications of the hero, Knut Hamsun. Hansen's fictionalizing approach gives the illusion of special access to Hamsun's interior life, and tends to present as unimpeachable truth what, more conventionally, might simply be called conjecture, interpretation, argumentation or opinion. Numerous critics took the book to task as a scandalous apologia supported by biased interpretations, convenient misunderstandings of legal procedure and an uncritical regurgitation of dubious collaborationist versions of the Occupation.³² Hansen was sharply criticized for embellishing 'fact' with 'fiction' to the point of 'pure invention' while also, however, receiving rapturous praise for his 'magnificent style' and 'epic' sense of history.³³

Proessen mot Hamsun remains, for most contemporary scholars, a deeply troubling violation of the axiomatic separation of fiction and testimony. It has led to a concern with factual correctness and, I would suggest, a corresponding critical paralysis on the question of fiction and literature as such. Recent critical readings, such as those of Ståle Dingstad and Monika Zagar, forcefully condemn Hamsun for obfuscating his responsibility to the *facts*. *On Overgrown Paths* is deeply biased, observes Dingstad, because it includes Hamsun's speech but not the testimonials that contradicted him in court.³⁴ Such instances are not 'literary paradoxes', insists Dingstad, they are 'plain discrepancies showing that Hamsun is quite simply lying, and thereby displaying contempt for the court and the reader'.³⁵ Another example seized upon in this mode of criticism is the letter Hamsun sent to the Attorney General in July 1946, where he complains bitterly of his humiliating committal to the Psychiatric Clinic in Oslo: 'I knew I was innocent,' complains the writer, 'deaf and innocent; I would have done very well in an examination by the public prosecutor just by telling most of the truth.'³⁶ Hamsun 'avoids addressing the substance of the charges', asserts Zagar; he proposes to offer only 'most of the truth' – he 'does not offer "the truth, nothing but the truth," but approximations and ambiguities'.³⁷

Ingar Sletten Kolloen's recent biography, however, provides another twist because he uses a *novelistic form*, precisely, to highlight the discrepancy between Hamsun's version of the Occupation and those of his contemporaries. Pre-empting, and thereby avoiding, the by now familiar spectacle of Hamsun before the court, Kolloen narrates a meeting during the Summer of 1947 when the author rehearsed his court address to a group of friends and acquaintances. This allows the biographer to conjure up an imaginary audience of historically situated listeners, including Hamsun's lawyer Sigrid Stray, who 'has worked against the occupying power', and his German and Jewish friend, Max Tau, who 'has lost nearly all of his relatives and Jewish friends'.³⁸ That the meeting itself took place and was 'real' should not distract our attention from what the *literary treatment* delivers: a 'fiction' of different listeners – different ears – which opens up a sense of intersubjective contextuality and ethical consequence that is sorely lacking in Hamsun's own account, yet also in the assumption that facts, without bias or ambiguity, can deliver *testimonial* truth.

The dangerous *conjunction* of fiction and testimony, then, makes possible not simply Hansen's apologia, but also Kolloen's historical 'invention' of critical counter-testimonials. And there is nothing 'paradoxical' about the functions of literature here. Literary fiction is distinguished by its capacity, argues Derrida, to *simulate* testimony, indeed, to reproduce every testimonial position imaginable. The paradox or aporia arises only in the encounter between literature and law, fiction and testimony. 'By law', writes Derrida, 'a testimony must not be a work of art or fiction. In testimony, *Wahrheit* excludes *Dichtung*'.³⁹ The *relation* between fiction and testimony, however, has always been reciprocal. If testimony was exorcized of all fiction, 'to become proof, information, certainty, or archive' it would, says Derrida, 'lose its function as testimony. In order to remain testimony, it must therefore allow itself to be haunted'.⁴⁰ Testimony, moreover, 'is always autobiographical: it tells, in the first person, the sharable and unsharable secret of what happened to me, to me, to me alone, the absolute secret of what I was in a position to live, see, hear, touch, sense, feel'.⁴¹ The unsharable secrets of autobiography, furthermore, depend on the resources of a medium, such as literature. And here's the rub:

[T]here is no testimony that does not structurally imply in itself the possibility of fiction, simulacra, dissimulation, lie, and perjury – that is to say, the possibility of literature, of the innocent or perverse literature that innocently plays at perverting all of these distinctions.⁴²

But is *On Overgrown Paths* really so 'innocent' when, as literature, it perverts the distinctions of law, and lets itself be haunted by fiction, simulacra, dissimulation, lie, and perjury? The question itself – which concerns only the question of culpability, and often uncertain culpabilities at that – tends to close down, and relegate to silence, the very possibility of literature, that to which *On Overgrown Paths* testifies so insistently.

Autobiographical Resistance and Digression

It was observed earlier that *On Overgrown Paths*, while failing in terms of responsible attestation, was nonetheless recognized as a testimony to Hamsun as a creative writer. The normative distinction between fiction and testimony, however, entails a systemic deafness to what Derrida calls 'the possibility of literature'. This is perhaps the real scandal of *On Overgrown Paths* – not Hamsun's lamentable dissimulations but, rather, the way he puts literature and fiction to work in a manner that perverts the classical concept of testimony and autobiography as such. The text itself, furthermore, actively resists the conventions of confessional autobiography, as when the first person narrator flatly refuses to write '*Levnetsløp*', that is, traditional autobiography or 'life-chronology': 'I am a product. But I won't write *Levnetsløp*.'⁴³ As the critic Steinar Gimnes observes, *On Overgrown Paths* systematically resists not just classical autobiography, but also the underlying structure of the psychiatric report, which gives a psychobiographical chronicle of Hamsun's childhood, adolescence and manhood.⁴⁴ Hamsun's text is fraught with disavowal as the writer all the time seeks refuge in a posture of 'distanced wisdom and calm', making what is hurtful appear 'indifferent'.⁴⁵ 'My father too had a hopeful son once' says the narrating ego at one point, immediately adding a disclaimer: 'But let us not, in disappointment, be tragic. It's just not worth it.'⁴⁶ There is, observes Gimnes, 'a strong tension in this writing ego, between what opens for a "tragic", personal perspective, and what closes it, or dismisses it'.⁴⁷ As a kind of counter-motif to the narrator's resistances – the autobiographical resistances to autobiography – Gimnes locates in the text what he calls a 'calling-motif'. He associates this with the 'productive' work of the literary 'calling' which for him 'expresses a psychological, existential desire, and also an artistic one'.⁴⁸ Gimnes, however, does not recognize *as rhetoric* the recurring figures and tropes of *hearing* and *deafness*, probably because Hamsun's deafness, after all, was very real, which is to say, not 'fictional' enough to be read or heard as 'literature'. But there it is: the text keeps marking the disjunction again and again, for example, in one of the moments that would exemplify the motif of the literary calling. 'Someone is calling me, I can hear it', says the narrator, apropos of nothing in particular, before turning this 'calling' (as Gimnes rightly observes) into a device for showing his general derision and contempt for the psychiatric institution: 'It is an omission on my part not to have turned this little knob for the psychiatrists, so I could have received a nice name for it . . . It must be schizophrenia, at least.'⁴⁹ Then, however, the 'calling-motif' is submitted to the rhetoric of deafness, turning the obscure 'call' of memory upon the deafness of the psychiatrist:

Is, then, the idea that someone was calling me pulled out of thin air? It can be traced back to a couple of Professor Langfeldt's questions: Had I ever experienced anything strange, anything that could be called supernatural? In my innocence I began to reconstruct a very deep and beautiful childhood

experience, but it came to nothing, and all my efforts were wasted on him; he understood nothing. But haven't you *heard* anything?' he asked. I didn't answer. Couldn't be bothered.⁵⁰

The narrating 'I' seems to promise a self-analysis regarding the 'call', but writes only of a scene distinguished by mutual deafness: 'Someone is calling me, I can hear it', he says; 'But haven't you *heard* anything?', interrupts the psychiatrist. As the object of analysis, he is not heard by the other, but neither does he hear the other. In the mode of self-analysis, he just marks the impasse, and frustrates the reader: 'It was no doubt the recollection of this session that turned into someone calling me. I cannot think of anything more profound to say about it.'⁵¹ And there is, in a very real sense, nothing more to say, except that the text – from start to finish – keeps marking and re-marking the same kind of impasse: 'So many things crowd in on me at this moment, things I could say in my defence, but I shall keep quiet about them.'⁵² The narrator digresses into other memories, but soon cuts these off as well: 'Well, those were the days of my youth, which are of no interest now and will not be mentioned.'⁵³ Later on, he gently parodies the figure of the confessional writer: 'I sharpen two fresh pencils with the sheath knife to be ready for a sublime explanation, but it won't come.'⁵⁴ So far, he has been preoccupied with spinning a narrative around the mysterious sheath knife he happened to discover. Towards the end, the impasse turns into despondent helplessness: 'All this is insignificant';⁵⁵ 'Am I just indulging in idle chatter?'; 'Have I explained myself now?'⁵⁶ We encounter here the force of the 'third voice', that which annuls everything, like a depressive tick, but which has a very precise, figural elaboration as a rhetoric of deafness.

On Overgrown Paths refuses to explain, frustrates attempts at explanation, and will surely depress anyone hoping to affirm 'productive', 'existential' or 'artistic' desires. And yet, the text also turns this darkness around in ways that, quite unexpectedly, transform this otherwise uneasy experience of reading. Moving from the dark winter in which the court address takes place near the end of the book, and towards the mid-summer day of the verdict, the narrator registers the signs of spring and stirring life. Paralleling the seasonal cycles they describe, the familiar Hamsunian tropes and figures flicker to life once again. Fragmentary memories return to the narrator, and eventually settle on the following: 'A recollection wells up in me from my first period as an emigrant', a recollection from 'a foreign landscape and a dry little prairie town'.⁵⁷ The trope of the 'home abroad' returns here as a foreign word, in a foreign setting. On the farm where he worked, his '*Matmor*' (lit. 'Food Mother'), which is to say, his substitute mother, '*lærte mig Ordet homesick*' – 'taught me the word homesick'.⁵⁸ Hamsun writes in *Danø* Norwegian, but uses the English word for '*Hjemve*': one is by definition 'homesick' in a foreign language which gives the experience another name, where 'homesick', for example, replaces '*Hjemve*'. This is the only digression in the whole book, moreover, where the narrator himself is *named*, again by a woman, on a foreign path, and in a foreign

tongue: '*Hallo, Nut. Skremte jeg dig?*', 'Hello, Noot. Did I scare you?'⁵⁹ The peasant girl Bridget calls him thus, and marks his name with her foreign tongue, or more precisely, with her Anglo-American (mis)pronunciation of K-nut. The American recollection then rapidly assumes the form of a narrative, replete with Hamsunian irony and the kind of comedy that recalls Mark Twain. Several old tropes and figures – those which characterize the autobiographical inscription – crowd in at this moment. Noot wanders from one farm job to another, falls in love with Bridget without properly realizing it, and recalls a haunting memory of burying a dead infant on one of the farms, before working his way up from delivery boy to shop assistant in a local store, whereupon his love interest is displaced by another series of tropes. Bridget has moved to town with her mother, gladly and therefore disconcertingly, in Noot's view, because she has abandoned her childhood home, where there was 'a small path into the forest', 'had Bridget forgotten that?' Noot's sentimental lament is, of course, deeply ironic, because the story begins on the same path, where the same stream running through the field is initially dismissed by the homesick Noot as dull and forlorn in comparison to its blue equivalent '*derhjemme*' ('there-at-home') in Norway.⁶⁰ Now, however, the American home is imbued with the excessive pathos of loss: 'And the stream that flowed so sweetly down through the whole field, now it has been sold. Dear Lord and God and Father, the stream is sold!'⁶¹ Noot's unrealized love for Bridget, in the meantime, has been supplanted by another triangle: his Irish friend, Pat, falls in love with Bridget, but only because of his jealous envy of an Austrian baker, with whom Bridget works as an apprentice. The Austrian kindly offers to take care of her laundry, with the comical result that the increasingly agitated Pat (who is already annoyed by the Austrian's clotheslines disrupting the view from his lodgings) now has to endure the regular sight of his loved one's underwear hung out to dry – by his imagined rival. The art of Hamsun's literary fiction often proceeds from the complex overlay of themes and tropes, where certain conservative ideas remain intact, but are held in suspense by irony and comedy. Thus, while Noot laments the fall of Bridget, her contamination by the ways of the city, the work of literary rhetoric undermines his indignant attitude by showing him working his way up in the store, wearing a suit, acting the gentleman, and dining at hotels. The overarching theme of the story is the irresolution of homesickness. Both Pat and Noot declare their discontent with America's uprooted people. Agreeing that they should both return to their respective homelands, Ireland and Norway, they fail, however, to share a common perspective. In their immaturity, they refuse to see what the other longs for in their own homeland; as friends they exchange books, but are unable to read each other's mother tongues. The narrative ends as they part ways and lose touch with one another en route for other American adventures, once again digressing from home.

One recalls here the way *Growth of the Soil*, as it were, leaves the woman behind in the monumental celebration of the masculine peasant, but nevertheless dwells upon her in the final lines as a 'dot' amid humanity. One recalls also the

multicoloured 'stain' on the narrating tourist's shirt from the travelogue *In Wonderland*, which associates him with unidentifiable others and ethnic women. When the American digression in *On Overgrown Paths* dissolves and returns to the ailing narrator in the present – with only one short passage left before the 'verdict' and the 'end of my writing' – the narrator likens himself and his failing eyesight, directly, to another marginal female figure, from Nordland, who used to pass from farm to farm begging for tobacco to relieve her toothache. 'Maren Maria was a mysterious figure among us', he says, on account of her uncertain origins. She had '*Gangsyn*' in her old age, 'walking sight', just enough sight to walk, and retained this to the end. She 'chewed tobacco like a skipper' and was 'otherwise disgusting and had no shame'.⁶²

Hamsun's writing would retain, to the very end, a combination of obstinate pride, sly subtlety, and mischievous humour, forever working over the figurations of home and origin, but from positions of displacement and marginality, or else attached to what is incompatible with his politics: the dot, the stain, the woman. *On Overgrown Paths* still echoes the tensions and schisms of the entire oeuvre.

Autobiography as Literary Testimony

In what sense does *On Overgrown Paths* echo the entire oeuvre, and how might this be understood in relation to the autobiographical 'voice', or 'voices', of the text? Gimnes' reading rests upon the humanist assumption that the text – however unreliable and duplicitous – nonetheless issues from a single and unified voice or consciousness which stretches all the way back to the 'calling-motif' in *Mysteries* (1892), *Pan* (1895) and *Under the Autumn Star* (1906). This humanist insistence upon unity and coherence entails a critical resistance to the diagnosis of 'mental impairment'. *On Overgrown Paths*, however, gives no such reassurance: 'It won't come to anything,' the despondent writer says at one point, 'it's just an old habit. I leak tentative words. I am a tap that drips, one, two, three –'.⁶³ The idea of the author as a mindless tap, dripping words as an old habit, is not easy to take. Gimnes, in fact, refuses to take it, maintaining that, 'as literary art published in book form' Hamsun's book 'is of course *about* something and *for* someone'.⁶⁴ The underlying assumption, here, is still that of the unified source or origin: the author. But 'the author' is slippery in never letting the name 'Hamsun' pass from the cover of the book and into the text, so that the narrating 'I' can be instantly fixed to 'Hamsun' as a historical subject – 'the real man', as it were. One notices here another logic whereby the narrating 'I' ties himself to the factual chronology, while never letting the name 'Hamsun' be identified as such by the institutions of the law (the police, the psychiatrists, the courts). The letter to the Attorney General, for instance, is reproduced and signed off with a 'Respectfully yours', but includes no signature. He does not evade the law simply by omitting the name, but also by the way he frames his address to

the court. First, there is the parenthetical remark that precedes the speech: 'My speech, here, follows the stenographic transcript. (NB! Hereafter the transcriber's spelling, and not corrected by the author).'⁶⁵ Then, there is the remark from the opening of the speech itself:

I must incidentally apologise for my aphasia, which can make my words, those expressions I'd have to choose at random, easily overstate my meaning, yes understate it too.⁶⁶

This is how Hamsun hands his testimony over to the other, to the court, the public domain and, for posterity, his readers. The document is rendered unreliable *from the point of origin* in two senses, first, by the rather petty insinuation that the transcription may not be entirely correct and, secondly, by the assertion that the speaker himself cannot fully control his speech, that which, in Hasselknippe's report, was delivered in a 'booming voice', both tragic and comic.

This calls to mind Kafka's figuration of the voice in 'Metamorphosis', where Gregor Samsa has turned into a disgusting insect. His voice is uncanny, both intimately familiar and profoundly strange, 'unmistakably his own voice', but with 'a persistent twittering squeak behind it like an undertone, which left the words clear in their shape only for the first moment and then rose up reverberating', enveloping both speaker and listener 'to destroy their sense, so that one could not be sure one had heard them rightly'.⁶⁷ Words lose their senses; people lose their senses. This figuration of the voice describes, perhaps, the sense in which *On Overgrown Paths* remains enveloped by the nocturnal silence of deafness while, nevertheless, producing a literary polyphony that is 'unmistakably his own voice'. To illustrate this sense, I will refer only to the figural work of the title – *On Overgrown Paths* – and how this, in its own way, reconfigures once again the problematic of fiction and testimony, literature and autobiography.

The title, first of all, is a figure that recalls other figures in Hamsun's oeuvre: the paths of migration, movement and travel, long since overgrown. It recalls, for example, a fleeting moment from the travelogue *In Wonderland* (1903), which is itself a factual chronology tracing an itinerary (through imperial Russia, on the way to the Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea), marked by fictional digressions and inventions. The narrating tourist, here, looks out of the train window passing through transient landscapes, and catches a glimpse of something 'homely' (*hjemlig*), 'a path cutting through the forest' which is 'half overgrown', upon which 'a man walks with a sack on his back'.⁶⁸ This might recall or prefigure, in turn, the myth of origin in the opening lines of *Growth of the Soil*: the 'long, long path over the moors and into the forest', here figured as the 'first' path, trodden by 'the first one who came here', carrying 'a sack, the first sack'.⁶⁹ The myth of origin, then, is already prefigured by its displacement in foreign places in the earlier travelogue. The title, *On Overgrown Paths*, also recalls the haunting opening passage from the novel *Under the Autumn Star*

(*Under Høststjernen*, 1907), which re-figures the same problematic configurations – of origins, autobiography, uncanny doubles and foreign places. This novel forms a link to another chain, since it is the first instalment of the so-called Wanderer trilogy (1907–1909), which follows the (mis)fortunes and obsessions of a certain ‘Knud Pedersen’ (Hamsun’s baptismal name). Coming after *In Wonderland*, the novel begins on another ‘overgrown path’:

As I follow the overgrown path through the forest, my heart trembles with an unearthly joy. I remember a spot on the eastern shore of the Caspian where I once stood. There, it was like here, and then as now the sea was calm and torpid and iron-grey. I walked through the forest, I was moved to tears of rapture, I kept saying, dear God, to be here again!
As if I had been there before.⁷⁰

Déjà vu: Looking back, the title *On Overgrown Paths* looks back to *Under the Autumn Star* which looks further back (to the Caspian, one of *In Wonderland*’s destinations) opening up – before one even opens the book by turning over the title page – the perils of rhetoric, the condensed associations of metaphor and the contiguous displacements of metonymy which, as Paul de Man says, ‘radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration’.⁷¹ *On Overgrown Paths* becomes a vast echo chamber in which different voices from the oeuvre seem to be calling one another, in a curious polyphony, distorted by echoing reverberations. ‘As if I had been there before’, says Knud Pedersen, in a passage heavily marked by the referential aberrations of the Hamsunian autobiographical inscription. The passage begins as a recollection ‘here’ in the present (‘As I follow the overgrown path through the forest . . . I remember a spot on the eastern shore of the Caspian where I once stood’), while the play of verb tenses, very subtly, shifts the position of the narrating ‘I’ in time and place, throwing into doubt which of the two locations he occupies at the point of *déjà vu*. The passage would apparently take us back to the initial forest path, ‘here’ and ‘now’, but this moment comes instead in the past tense (‘I was moved to tears of rapture, I kept saying, dear God, to be here again!’). The ‘here’ and ‘now’ is thus displaced to a past event, after which the moment of *déjà vu* itself, still in the past tense, dislocates the initial ‘here’ of the narrating ego’s geographical location: ‘As if I had been there before’. Has the narrator now detached himself in order to occupy some ‘omniscient’ position? No. It is impossible to separate the recalling ‘I’ from the recalled ‘I’; the present ‘I’ located ‘here’ from the past ‘I’ located ‘there’. Straying from the initial symmetry of temporal and spatial positioning, the play of verb tenses and locations unhinges any clear-cut distinction between ‘then’ and ‘now’, ‘here’ and ‘there’. The narrating ‘I’ is neither here nor there, then nor now, but constantly migrating between the ‘there-here’ and the ‘then-now’.

The previous works recalled in the title *On Overgrown Paths* all involve different puzzles of autobiographical inscription: *In Wonderland* as a factual

chronology of an original itinerary, recounted through the resources of literature, figuration and fictional digressions; *Under the Autumn Star* as a novel that playfully deploys the author's original name for the purposes of a fictional narrative, as if the author wished to recast his 'original' self as an other ego, whereby 'Hamsun', as it were, re-inscribes 'Pedersen' and gives the latter a parallel life in fiction; and *Growth of the Soil* as a novel that, in its own way, draws upon the author's memories and fantasies of his own rustic origins – haunted, nonetheless, by what stifles growth at birth (infanticide) or uproots growth and displaces it (emigration). *On Overgrown Paths* can be seen as repeating and reconfiguring all these autobiographical inscriptions, as the narrating 'I' ties itself to a factual chronology but refuses to be named therein, yet allows himself to be named towards the very end, and then only on an *intimate* first-name basis, in a *foreign* tongue, and on a foreign path. The 'overgrown paths' of the title are marked by the plural and, hence, the plurality of itineraries. As the Dano-Norwegian word, '*gjengrodd*' can also imply, however, these paths are also 'closed up' by overgrowth. But the sense is double also here, since '*gjengrodd*' can also mean '*re-grown*': Not simply covered and obscured by overgrowth, then, but also entwined with new growth, restoring the original paths to a former condition, back to nature as it were, all the while, still recognizable as previously traversed, marked by remainders, traces – to be traced once again, after the writer inscribes the last word: '*Skrivning*', 'writing'.

The End of Writing

The title itself already defies, in a certain sense, the demand for confessional autobiography or factual attestation, because it establishes no secure position or location from which to speak but, rather, re-inscribes and transforms a figure reaching decades back into Hamsun's oeuvre, most notably to those books that already trouble the distinction between autobiography and fiction. The resistance to autobiography and psychobiography comes, however, in a book structured around the narrating ego's chronological account of the legal process, that is to say, the Hamsun case itself, as narrated by the defendant himself.

Should we read these refusals and resistances as Hamsun's stubborn and narcissistic contempt for 'the truth and nothing but the truth'? It is clear that *On Overgrown Paths* offers nothing near the 'transparent' disclosure posterity demands, and yet, I would argue that the value of this text lies in its 'literary' awareness of the limitation of testimony conceived in such terms. It is a text that insists on being the testimony of an author aggrieved by his treatment at the hands of the Norwegian authorities, which also, however, resists and undermines the kind of testimony one might expect or demand of such a text. As a consequence, it has been virtually impossible for posterity to navigate Hamsun's testimony without resorting to evasive apologia or confused condemnation. The compelling problem Hamsun leaves to his reader is, precisely, a

singular conjunction between fiction and testimony that makes it impossible to dissociate the trope of the narrating 'I' from the 'proper' testimonial or autobiographical voice of Knut Hamsun. Or, in the opposite direction, it is impossible to separate Knut Hamsun's testimony from literary fiction in general and from his own works in particular. The trouble, here, does not always concern 'fiction' and the perjuries this might involve, though it does concern literature, the literary signature – the stylistic, compositional and formal nature of the text – in other words, what I have elsewhere referred to as the *autobiographical inscription*. By this I do not mean the unavoidable sense that the narrator of *On Overgrown Paths* coincides with the author, and the overwhelming effect of prosopopeia that issues from this (autobiography, testimony, attestation); the autobiographical inscription concerns both the historical sense by which the author may not always coincide or agree with *himself*, and the rhetorical sense by which the narrating 'I' may not always fully coincide or agree with *itself*. These splits and schisms are not found *between* the author and the text, but *within* the 'author' – *within* the text.

A responsible reading of this text, I would argue, consists neither in fixing the autobiographical reference, nor extracting the text from this referentiality as though it could be de-contaminated and restored for a more 'literary' interpretation. Rather, it demands attention to the way fiction haunts testimony and vice versa. *On Overgrown Paths* certainly fails when all the truth, and nothing but the truth, is owing; but what is truly disconcerting about this book is its treacherous affirmation of the possibility of literature.

Notes

Introduction

- ¹ Derrida, 1995, p. 182.
- ² Langfeldt and Ødegård, 1978, p. 16.
- ³ Ibid, 82; emphases in original.
- ⁴ Quoted in ibid, 83.
- ⁵ Quoted in ibid, 82–3.
- ⁶ Ibid, 101; Stuberg, 1995, pp. 26–7.
- ⁷ HPS, 107.
- ⁸ PGS, 231/185.
- ⁹ Derrida, 1995, p. 187.
- ¹⁰ Breton, 1972, pp. 22–3.
- ¹¹ Andreas-Salomé, 1896, p. 557.
- ¹² For an illuminating study of ‘literary fascism’ in France, see Carroll, 1995.
- ¹³ Rosenberg, 1982, p. 268.
- ¹⁴ Ellmann, 2000, p. 220.
- ¹⁵ Kittang, 1995, p. 254–6.
- ¹⁶ Kjærstad, 1997, p. 142.
- ¹⁷ Derrida, 1995, 184.
- ¹⁸ Derrida, 1988, 647.
- ¹⁹ Derrida, 1995, p. 182.
- ²⁰ See Stuberg, 1995; Sjønberg, 1979; Beyer, 1990; and Kittang, 1995.
- ²¹ Césaire, 1972, p. 9–25.
- ²² Derrida, 1994, p. 16.
- ²³ HPS, 274.
- ²⁴ PGS, 154/192; Hamsun’s emphasis; tr. mod.
- ²⁵ Derrida, 1994, p. 83.
- ²⁶ McFarlane, 1960, p. 116.
- ²⁷ Löwenthal, 1957, p. 194.
- ²⁸ Ibid, 192.
- ²⁹ McFarlane, 1960, p. 149–50.
- ³⁰ Löwenthal, 1957, p. 194.
- ³¹ McFarlane, 1956, p. 593–4.
- ³² McFarlane, 1960, p. 251 & 155.
- ³³ Löwenthal, 1980, p. 104.
- ³⁴ Löwenthal, 1987, p. 178.
- ³⁵ Beyer, 1990, p. 137.
- ³⁶ Löwenthal, 1957, p. 190.

- ³⁷ Beyer, 1990, p. 148.
- ³⁸ Witoszek, 1998, p. 136.
- ³⁹ Kittang, 1984, p. 307.
- ⁴⁰ Kittang, 1995, pp. 265–6.
- ⁴¹ Mansfield, 1920, p. 767.
- ⁴² Popperwell, 1969, pp. 5–6; Næss, 1971, p. 34; and Graves, 1998, p. 31.
- ⁴³ Worster, 1920, pp. 258–9 .
- ⁴⁴ West, 1920, p. 167.
- ⁴⁵ Kolloen, 2003, p. 429 and Kolloen, 2004, p. 170.
- ⁴⁶ *Æ*, 237/123.
- ⁴⁷ Dostoyevsky, 1865–1866, p. 45; Moretti, 1998, p. 31.
- ⁴⁸ Moretti, 1998, p. 151.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 181 & 184.
- ⁵⁰ For instance, see Garborg, 2001, p. 53.
- ⁵¹ *SL* 1, 69.
- ⁵² Østby, 1972, pp. 6–13; Nag, 1969, p. 71. For an overview of English translations, see the bibliography to this book.
- ⁵³ Moretti, 1998, p. 149.
- ⁵⁴ Woolf, 1988, p. 421.
- ⁵⁵ Bennett as quoted in Graves, 1998, p. 18.
- ⁵⁶ *FMA*, 174/144.
- ⁵⁷ *FMA*, 175/144.
- ⁵⁸ *FMA*, 128/105; 148/122; 155/128; 157/130; 158–9/131–2 and 170/140.
- ⁵⁹ *FMA*, 5/11.
- ⁶⁰ *OH*, 76. See also Larsen, 1998, pp. 424–8.
- ⁶¹ *FMA*, 41/31.
- ⁶² *FMA*, 43/33.
- ⁶³ *FMA*, 43/33.
- ⁶⁴ *FMA*, 44/34.
- ⁶⁵ *FMA*, 51–2/40.
- ⁶⁶ *FMA*, 54/43.
- ⁶⁷ *FMA*, 53/42.
- ⁶⁸ *FMA*, 52/41 and 55/43.
- ⁶⁹ *FMA*, 68/55, tr. mod.
- ⁷⁰ *FMA*, 72/58, tr. mod.
- ⁷¹ *FMA*, 73/59.

Chapter 1

- ¹ Blanchot, 1993, p. 173.
- ² *HL*, 3.
- ³ *S*, 1/3.
- ⁴ E.g. Auster, 1998, pp. 9–20 and Gaskell, 1999, pp. 154–9.
- ⁵ Baumgartner, 1998, p. 21.
- ⁶ Céline, 1932, pp. 178–86.
- ⁷ Auster, 1987, p. 4.

- ⁸ Egerton, 1893, pp. 37–67. For the general context of the ‘She-Notes’, see Showalter, 1978, pp. 110–15. See also Fjågesund, 2002; and Rem, 2002.
- ⁹ De Man, 1979, p. 10.
- ¹⁰ Baumgartner, 1998, pp. 21–2.
- ¹¹ Löwenthal, 1957, p. 194.
- ¹² HL, 196.
- ¹³ Christophersen, 1979, p. 80.
- ¹⁴ S, 273/219, tr. mod.
- ¹⁵ Poe, 1986, pp. 182 & 183–4.
- ¹⁶ S, 276/221, tr. mod.
- ¹⁷ Kirkegaard, 1975, p. 140.
- ¹⁸ Kittang, 1984, p. 307.
- ¹⁹ Kittang, 1995, pp. 265–6.
- ²⁰ Royle, 2003, pp. 214 and 217.
- ²¹ Eggen, 1966, p. 84.
- ²² S, 2/4; 6/7 and 21/21, tr. mod.
- ²³ S, 30/25.
- ²⁴ S, 31/26–7, tr. mod.
- ²⁵ S, 32/27, tr. mod.
- ²⁶ S, 32/27.
- ²⁷ Vernon, 1984, p. 117.
- ²⁸ Royle, 2003, p. 214.
- ²⁹ SL 1, 114–15.
- ³⁰ FDUS, 17, as translated in McFarlane, 1956, pp. 568–9.
- ³¹ SL 1, 132.
- ³² SL 1, 70; emphasis in original.
- ³³ SL 1, 70.
- ³⁴ S, 7/7.
- ³⁵ S, 7/8.
- ³⁶ S, 19/17.
- ³⁷ S, 24/21, tr. mod.
- ³⁸ HL, 58.
- ³⁹ HL, 197.
- ⁴⁰ HL, 36.
- ⁴¹ HL, 41.
- ⁴² HL, 64.
- ⁴³ S, 316/253, my tr.
- ⁴⁴ S, 316/253, my tr.
- ⁴⁵ S, 28/23, my tr. See also HL, 18.
- ⁴⁶ HL, 136–7.
- ⁴⁷ HL, 126.
- ⁴⁸ S, 211/170.
- ⁴⁹ S, 211–12/170, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁰ S, 37/31, tr. mod.
- ⁵¹ S, 40/34, tr. mod.
- ⁵² HL, 137.
- ⁵³ See Lyngstad’s textual notes in HL, 203–6.
- ⁵⁴ Dingstad, 1998, pp. 30–8.

- ⁵⁵ S, 93/76.
⁵⁶ HB, 70.
⁵⁷ HL, 57.
⁵⁸ S, 92/75; HB, 69; and HL, 56.
⁵⁹ S, 109/145; HB, 113; and HL, 109.
⁶⁰ SV 1, 75.
⁶¹ S, 18/16.
⁶² De Man, 1986, p. 89.
⁶³ For an account of De Man's counterintuitive distinction between phenomenality and materiality, see Miller, 2001, pp. 183–204.
⁶⁴ S, 32/27, tr. mod.
⁶⁵ S, 32/27.
⁶⁶ S, 16/15, tr. mod.
⁶⁷ Stragnell, 1922, pp. 198–217.
⁶⁸ Ibid, 217.
⁶⁹ Ibid, 198 and 216.
⁷⁰ Ibid, 210–12.
⁷¹ Ibid, 215–16.
⁷² Evans, 1996, p. 97.
⁷³ S, 17/15, tr. mod.
⁷⁴ Stragnell, 1922, p. 216.
⁷⁵ HL, 14, tr. mod. See also S, 21–2/18–19.
⁷⁶ HL, 64.
⁷⁷ S, 107–8/87–8, my tr.
⁷⁸ HL, 65. Lyngstad's textual notes do not register this difference. See S, 107–8/87–8; and SV 1, 48.
⁷⁹ Jakobson, 1971, p. 269; he is quoting S, 109/88.
⁸⁰ HL, 66.
⁸¹ HL, 67.
⁸² HL, 67; and S, 111/90.
⁸³ HL, 68.
⁸⁴ S, 111/90, my tr.

Chapter 2

- ¹ Nietzsche, 1886, p. 62, § 97.
² DSG, 181/7, tr. mod.
³ Randers, 1892, pp. 86–7.
⁴ Ibid, 87–8, quoting M, 131/71; 63/294n; 209/308n; 315/164; and 319/166.
⁵ Randers, 1892, p. 88.
⁶ SL 1, 164, Hamsun's emphases.
⁷ Löwenthal, 1957, p. 207.
⁸ Carey, 1992, pp. 4–5.
⁹ M, 69/37.
¹⁰ Carey, 1992, p. 5. For Hamsun's 1945 obituary to Hitler, see HPS, 274, and for a translation, see Ferguson, 1987, p. 386.

- ¹¹ Carey refers to the play *At the Gates of the Kingdom* (*Ved Rigets Port*, 1895), which is not available in English translation; his source is Ferguson, 1987, p. 164.
- ¹² See Blanchot, 1993, pp. 136–70. See also Golomb and Wistrich, 2002.
- ¹³ Derrida, 1985, p. 28.
- ¹⁴ Beyer, 1959, p. 96.
- ¹⁵ McFarlane, 1956, pp. 580 and 582–3.
- ¹⁶ SL 2, 180.
- ¹⁷ M, 2–4/1–2.
- ¹⁸ Larsen, 2001, p. 125.
- ¹⁹ Nilson, 1965, pp. 299–300.
- ²⁰ Rottem, 2002, pp. 75–6.
- ²¹ Beyer, 1959, p. 95. See also HPS, 99.
- ²² Quoted from Meyer's introduction in Strindberg, 1991, p. 83. Strindberg read Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* in German, an important influence on his 1888 'Preface' to *Miss Julie*. See Törnqvist and Jacobs, 1988, p. 43.
- ²³ A similar point would apply to Nietzsche's influence in Anglophone literary modernism decades after its initial manifestations in Scandinavia. With reference to Joyce, Yeats and Lawrence, Michael Bell points out that Nietzschean thought 'was often mediated through other sources'. Bell, 2003, p. 64.
- ²⁴ Ibid, 72.
- ²⁵ FDUS, 19, emphasis in original.
- ²⁶ Nag, 1998, pp. 201–3. See also SL 1, 157, 196 and 199.
- ²⁷ FDUS, 24.
- ²⁸ Brandes, 1889 (Danish original) and Brandes, 1914 (English translation), hereafter abbreviated as AR, with page references to Danish version first, followed by corresponding page references to the translation.
- ²⁹ AR, 162/6–7.
- ³⁰ AR, 167/9.
- ³¹ AR, 169/10–11.
- ³² AR, 161/6.
- ³³ AR, 242/55.
- ³⁴ FDUS, 22 and 24, my emphasis.
- ³⁵ Strindberg, 1991, p. 95.
- ³⁶ HPS, 107.
- ³⁷ Strindberg, 1991, p. 94.
- ³⁸ FDUS, 18.
- ³⁹ FDUS, 43.
- ⁴⁰ FDUS, 15–16.
- ⁴¹ FDUS, 50.
- ⁴² Rønning, 2006, p. 31. For an account in English, see Meyer, 1971, pp. 572–3.
- ⁴³ FDUS, 57.
- ⁴⁴ Beyer, 1959, p. 96.
- ⁴⁵ Strindberg, 1890, p. 12.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid, 17.
- ⁴⁷ M, 9/5.
- ⁴⁸ Rottem, 2002, p. 83.
- ⁴⁹ FDUS, 49.
- ⁵⁰ FDUS, 63.

- ⁵¹ Lorentzen, 1996, p. 62.
- ⁵² M, 439/236, my tr.
- ⁵³ Rottem, 2002, p. 88.
- ⁵⁴ Strindberg, 1890, p. 26.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid, 29.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid, 30–1.
- ⁵⁷ M, 48/28.
- ⁵⁸ M, 73/39.
- ⁵⁹ Strindberg, 1890, p. 48.
- ⁶⁰ M, 338/179.
- ⁶¹ Strindberg, 1890, p. 34.
- ⁶² Ibid, 32.
- ⁶³ Ibid, 33–4.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid, 34.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid, 36–7.
- ⁶⁶ Dostoyevsky, 1865, pp. 29 and 46.
- ⁶⁷ M, 65/35.
- ⁶⁸ M, 66/36.
- ⁶⁹ M, 133/72.
- ⁷⁰ M, 68/36 tr. mod.
- ⁷¹ M, 69/37.
- ⁷² AR, 169/10–11; and 161/6.
- ⁷³ M, 70–1/37–8.
- ⁷⁴ M, 73/39; tr. mod.
- ⁷⁵ Freud, 1900, pp. 335 and 714.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid, 713.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid, 715.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid, 718.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid, 733.
- ⁸⁰ FDUS, 13.
- ⁸¹ FDUS, 14.

Chapter 3

- ¹ SL 1, 217, Hamsun's emphasis.
- ² P, 9/3.
- ³ P, 10/16.
- ⁴ Anonymous review, *Bergens Tidende*, 14 December 1894. Cited in Rottem, 2002, pp. 92–3.
- ⁵ Andreas-Salomé, 1896, p. 557.
- ⁶ Weininger, 2001, p. 4.
- ⁷ Ferguson, 1987, p. 155.
- ⁸ P, 26/20.
- ⁹ Lien, 1993, p. 13.
- ¹⁰ Andreas-Salomé, 1896, p. 558.
- ¹¹ Baumgartner, 1998, p. 85.
- ¹² P, 108/116.

- ¹³ SL 1, 179.
- ¹⁴ M, 439/236, my tr.
- ¹⁵ SL 1, 175.
- ¹⁶ SL 1, 175–6.
- ¹⁷ Olav Thommessen, *Verdens Gang*, 15 October 1891. Cited in Nag, 1998, pp. 204–5.
- ¹⁸ See Ferguson, 1987, pp. 124–5.
- ¹⁹ See Beyer, 1975, pp. 130 and 133.
- ²⁰ Arne Garborg, ‘Svært til Kar’, *Dagbadet*, 2 April 1893. Reprinted in Garborg, 2001, p. 53.
- ²¹ SL 2, 22, tr. mod.
- ²² NHS 25, 119.
- ²³ NHS 25, 131.
- ²⁴ Freijlif Olsen, ‘Knut Hamsun og Den moderne literatur’, *Politiken*, 29 March 1893. Cited in Larsen, 2002, p. 439.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, 439–40.
- ²⁶ Letter of Amalie Skram. Cited in Larsen, 2002, p. 443.
- ²⁷ Report in *København*, 29 March 1893. Cited in Larsen, 2002, p. 443.
- ²⁸ Jeppe Aakjær cited in Larsen, 2002, p. 445.
- ²⁹ Letter of Hamsun. Cited in Larsen, 2002, p. 445.
- ³⁰ SL 2, 18.
- ³¹ See SL 1, 180, 182 and 185.
- ³² Nils Vogt cited in Lyngstad, 2005, p. 79.
- ³³ De Man, 1984, p. 69.
- ³⁴ Ellmann, 2000, p. 228.
- ³⁵ M, 15/9.
- ³⁶ M, 16/9.
- ³⁷ M, 20/12, tr. mod.
- ³⁸ M, 22/13, tr. mod.
- ³⁹ M, 26/15.
- ⁴⁰ M, 32–3/19, tr. mod.
- ⁴¹ M, 218/115, tr. mod.
- ⁴² M, 51/293n, my tr.
- ⁴³ M, 51/29, translation modified following the 1954 version, SV 1, 159.
- ⁴⁴ Critchley, 1999, pp. 224–5.
- ⁴⁵ HL, 57.
- ⁴⁶ M, 293/155, tr. mod.
- ⁴⁷ Brandes, 1889, pp. 202–3/Brandes, 1914, pp. 31–32.
- ⁴⁸ Weininger, 2001, p. 105.
- ⁴⁹ SL 1, 164.
- ⁵⁰ M, 479/260, tr. mod.
- ⁵¹ P, 17/23–4, tr. mod.
- ⁵² P, 46/40.
- ⁵³ P, 50/44, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁴ P, 52/46.
- ⁵⁵ P, 56/49, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁶ P, 58/51.

- ⁵⁷ P, 59/52, tr. mod.
⁵⁸ P, 27/21.
⁵⁹ P, 70/63.
⁶⁰ M, 38/22, tr. mod.
⁶¹ Freud, 1910, p. 232.
⁶² Hitschmann, 1926, p. 350.
⁶³ Goethe, 1774, p. 115.
⁶⁴ Otto Stoessel, *Gesammelte Werke. Der Gesamtausgabe dritter Band*. Wien: Geist und Gestalt, 1935, p. 206. Cited in Theodorsen, 2003, p. 15.
⁶⁵ M, 262/138.
⁶⁶ M, 264–5/139, tr. mod.
⁶⁷ M, 260, 261 and 262/137 and 138, tr. mod.
⁶⁸ M, 266/140, tr. mod. This does not appear in the original; Hamsun added it later, see SV 1, 248.
⁶⁹ M, 1/1.
⁷⁰ M, 247–8/131.
⁷¹ M, 272/144, tr. mod.
⁷² M, 273/154, tr. mod.
⁷³ M, 61/34.
⁷⁴ Freud, 1910, p. 236.
⁷⁵ Braatøy, 1929, p. 69.
⁷⁶ M, 58/32, tr. mod.
⁷⁷ M, 399–400/213–14.
⁷⁸ M, 56/31.
⁷⁹ P, 106/98.
⁸⁰ M, 94/52.
⁸¹ Freud, 1920, p. 310.
⁸² Freud, 1919, p. 340.
⁸³ V, 232/77, tr. mod.
⁸⁴ Hans Aanrud, review of *Pan*, in *Norske Intelligenssedler*, 10 December 1894. Cited in Rottem, 2002, p. 92.
⁸⁵ Freud, 1920, p. 310.
⁸⁶ Freud, 1919, pp. 359–60.
⁸⁷ Royle, 2003, p. 13.
⁸⁸ Kittang, 1984, p. 13.
⁸⁹ Ibid, 28, Kittang's emphasis.
⁹⁰ Ibid, 29.
⁹¹ Derrida, 1987a, p. 351.
⁹² Ibid, 351–2.
⁹³ M, 1/1.
⁹⁴ Cited in Williams, 1995, p. 257.
⁹⁵ M, 251/132.
⁹⁶ M, 351/186.
⁹⁷ M, 12/6–7.
⁹⁸ Lorentzen, 1996, p. 65.
⁹⁹ Freud, 1919, pp. 356 and 357.
¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 356.

Chapter 4

- ¹ SL 1, 69–70.
- ² NHS 25, 175.
- ³ IÆ, 32/170, tr. mod. Page references to *Samlede Verker* alongside Lyngstad's translation of *In Wonderland* are cited throughout. Most quotations, however, are translated by myself, as I find Lyngstad's rendering often insensitive to the syntax, style and figurative language of Hamsun's travelogue.
- ⁴ IÆ, 161/20.
- ⁵ IÆ, 227/107, my tr.
- ⁶ IÆ, 227/108, tr. mod.
- ⁷ Hansen, 1978, p. 31; Kolloen, 2003, p. 30.
- ⁸ IÆ, 228/109, my tr.
- ⁹ Oxfeldt, 2005b, p. 16.
- ¹⁰ SV 4, 281.
- ¹¹ Ferguson, 1987, pp. 241 and 296.
- ¹² See Larsen's textual note in NHS 25, 279–80.
- ¹³ NHS 25, 174.
- ¹⁴ George, 1996, p. 14.
- ¹⁵ See Popperwell, 1972, pp. 191–211; McFarlane, 1960, pp. 169–88; Downs, 1966, pp. 99–115; and Hansen and Savik, 1980.
- ¹⁶ See Lyngstad's textual notes in HL, 203; M, 291; and P, 129.
- ¹⁷ Dingstad, 1998, pp. 35–6.
- ¹⁸ HSL, 197, tr. mod.
- ¹⁹ S, 333/266 and SV 1, 134.
- ²⁰ *Landsmaal* is today known as *Nynorsk* (New-Norwegian), whereas Norwegianized Dano-Norwegian is usually called *Bokmål* (Book-language) or *Riksmål* (Official Language). Our present concern is simply to grasp the logic of Hamsun's argument, where the erasure of 'Danish' is part of the trouble.
- ²¹ HPS, 187.
- ²² HPS, 190.
- ²³ HPS, 188.
- ²⁴ HPS, 212.
- ²⁵ SL 1, 69.
- ²⁶ SL 1, 70, emphasis in original.
- ²⁷ Joyce, 1939, p. 16.
- ²⁸ HPS, 216.
- ²⁹ Such is the logic of Henning Wærp's reading of *In Wonderland*, which supplies biographical information where the texts do not. See Wærp, 2005–2006.
- ³⁰ IÆ, 161/20, tr. mod.
- ³¹ IÆ, 281/184, my tr.
- ³² SV 4, 303.
- ³³ SV 4, 304.
- ³⁴ Kittang, 1984, p. 132.
- ³⁵ Oxfeldt, 2005a, p. 218.
- ³⁶ SV 4, 303.
- ³⁷ IÆ, 161/20, my tr.
- ³⁸ IÆ, 161/20, my tr.

- ³⁹ Kittang, 1984, p. 138.
- ⁴⁰ Oxfeldt, 2005a, p. 218.
- ⁴¹ IÆ, 175/38.
- ⁴² Spivak, 2008, p. 6.
- ⁴³ IÆ, 180/45.
- ⁴⁴ IÆ, 124/91 and 216/93, tr. mod.
- ⁴⁵ IÆ, 172/34 and 176/39.
- ⁴⁶ IÆ, 224/103.
- ⁴⁷ IÆ, 226/105, tr. mod.
- ⁴⁸ IÆ, 232/115, tr. mod.
- ⁴⁹ IÆ, 233/116, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁰ IÆ, 234/117, tr. mod.
- ⁵¹ IÆ, 236/121, tr. mod.
- ⁵² IÆ, 239/125, tr. mod.
- ⁵³ IÆ, 237/122, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁴ IÆ, 183/48–9, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁵ IÆ, 232/114 and 233/117, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁶ IÆ, 237/123, my tr.
- ⁵⁷ IÆ, 254/145, my tr.
- ⁵⁸ IÆ, 173/36, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁹ IÆ, 175/38.
- ⁶⁰ IÆ, 179/43, tr. mod.
- ⁶¹ IÆ, 185/50 and 202/75.
- ⁶² IÆ, 174/36, tr. mod.
- ⁶³ The term ‘Islamofascism’ should be rejected outright. It unjustly projects a European history of violence onto the Other (now ‘radical Muslims’), and thus perpetuates the racist assumption that such violence (now ‘terrorism’) belongs exclusively to ‘them’. Nazism, I have already argued after Césaire, is a European affair that brings the violence of imperialism home. See Césaire, 1972, pp. 9–25.
- ⁶⁴ SV 4, 260.
- ⁶⁵ SV 4, 261.
- ⁶⁶ Mustapha Chérif’s conversation with Jacques Derrida in *Islam & The West*, shows, among other things, Derrida’s struggle to resist the reductive force of this very title, while insisting on friendship and solidarity. See Chérif, 2008.

Chapter 5

- ¹ Mansfield, 1920, p. 767.
- ² Benjamin, 1985, p. 142.
- ³ Hjärne, 1920, p. 166.
- ⁴ Sereny, 2001, pp. 124–5.
- ⁵ Ibid, 117.
- ⁶ Ibid, 130.
- ⁷ MG, 7–8/3–4.
- ⁸ Nettum, 1975, p. 180.
- ⁹ Ferguson, 1987, p. 422.
- ¹⁰ MG, 29/23.

- ¹¹ MG, 8/3–4, my tr.
- ¹² Löwenthal, 1980, p. 104.
- ¹³ Löwenthal, 1957, pp. 204–5.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, p. 203.
- ¹⁵ All the small coastal towns of Norway were connected to the telegraph network by 1870. The currency changeover from *daler* to *kroner* took place in 1875. See Danielsen et al., 1995, p. 245.
- ¹⁶ Witoszek, 1997, p. 220.
- ¹⁷ Carl Nærup, 'Hamsun', review of *Growth of the Soil*, *Lørdagsavisen: Tillægsblad til 'Tidens Tegn'*, 15, 22 December 1917. Cited in Rottem, 1983, p. 15.
- ¹⁸ Engels cited in Lukács, 1989, p. 136.
- ¹⁹ For the general history, see Danielsen et al., 1995, pp. 271–7 and 296. On the subject of nineteenth-century culture in Norway, see Bø, 1998; and Nerbøvik, 1998.
- ²⁰ Benjamin, 1985, p. 124.
- ²¹ Kafka, 1964, p. 390–1.
- ²² MG, 338–9/310.
- ²³ Derrida, 1976, pp. 114–5.
- ²⁴ Wells, 1921, p. 95 and 124.
- ²⁵ Cited in Baumgartner, 1998, p. 120.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Hjärne, 1920, p. 168.
- ²⁸ MG, 105/96.
- ²⁹ MG, 29/23–4, my tr.
- ³⁰ Joll, 1990, pp. 143–68.
- ³¹ Anonymous, 1920, p. 334.
- ³² Wiehr, 1922, pp. 104–50.
- ³³ Mann, 1983, pp. 65 and 46.
- ³⁴ Larsen, 1922, pp. 160–1.
- ³⁵ Rosenberg, 1982, p. 268.
- ³⁶ Löwenthal, 1980, p. 72.
- ³⁷ Derrida, 1985, p. 6.
- ³⁸ Ibid, 29.
- ³⁹ Ibid, 32.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, 1985, p. 30.
- ⁴¹ Cited from translated extracts in Miller and Rubb, 1978, pp. 115–7.
- ⁴² MG, 237/217, tr. mod.
- ⁴³ Hermand, 1992, p. 208.
- ⁴⁴ According to a polemic in the 'Right of Reply' section of *The Jerusalem Post*, 7 July 2009, *Growth of the Soil* is 'readily available in Hebrew' and was 'popular among kibbutz members' before and after the Second World War. See Ueland, 2009.
- ⁴⁵ Rosenberg cited in Pois, 1970, p. 129.
- ⁴⁶ MG, 357/323.
- ⁴⁷ MG, 241/221.
- ⁴⁸ MG, 234/215.
- ⁴⁹ MG, 241/221.
- ⁵⁰ MG, 241–2/296, my tr.
- ⁵¹ GS, 296.

- ⁵² MG, 347/319.
- ⁵³ Rottem, 1983, p. 56.
- ⁵⁴ MG, 349/320.
- ⁵⁵ MG, 135/124, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁶ MG, 261/240, my tr.
- ⁵⁷ MG, 262/240, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁸ MG, 347/318–9.
- ⁵⁹ Deavin, 1996. *National Vanguard* is a monthly publication by a U.S. Neo-Nazi group called ‘National Alliance’ founded in 1974 by William Pierce, an ideologue with links to the British National Party (BNP) and to German Neo-Nazi groups.
- ⁶⁰ It’s an old observation in studies of Nazism that the categories of eugenics and race in The Third Reich were opportunistic in their tendency to assimilate all sorts of ‘variations’ under the Nordic-Aryan ideal including, of course, the dark-haired Hitler. See Mosse, 1968, p. 58.
- ⁶¹ Bhabha, 1994, pp. 67–8.
- ⁶² Auerbach, 1974, p. 545.
- ⁶³ To retain the effect, all quotations from the novel omit quotation marks wherever English translations use these.
- ⁶⁴ MG, 7/3, my tr.
- ⁶⁵ Heller, 1984, pp. 174–5.
- ⁶⁶ Freud, 1899, p. 307.
- ⁶⁷ Freud, 1919, p. 347.
- ⁶⁸ Freud, 1899, pp. 307–8.
- ⁶⁹ Freud, 1896, pp. 181–2.
- ⁷⁰ Freud, 1899, pp. 307–8.
- ⁷¹ MG, 18/12, my tr.
- ⁷² MG, 19/14, tr. mod.
- ⁷³ Mansfield, 1920, p. 767.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid.
- ⁷⁵ Sereny, 2001, pp. 99 and 133.
- ⁷⁶ Freud, 1899, pp. 307–8.
- ⁷⁷ Derrida, 1989, p. 845.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid, 846.
- ⁷⁹ MG, 22/17–8.
- ⁸⁰ MG, 24/19.
- ⁸¹ MG, 29/24.
- ⁸² MG, 11–2/7.
- ⁸³ MG, 12/17, my tr.
- ⁸⁴ MG, 12/8, tr. mod.
- ⁸⁵ MG, 22/17, my tr.
- ⁸⁶ MG, 29/31.
- ⁸⁷ MG, 31/26.
- ⁸⁸ MG, 31/27, my tr.
- ⁸⁹ MG, 33–4/28, my tr.
- ⁹⁰ MG, 241/221 my tr.
- ⁹¹ Freud, 1919, p. 345.
- ⁹² MG, 60/52, my tr.
- ⁹³ MG, 60/53, my tr.

- ⁹⁴ MG, 62–3/56, my tr.
- ⁹⁵ MG, 63/56, tr. mod.
- ⁹⁶ MG, 64/57, my tr.
- ⁹⁷ MG, 59, 77 and 102/53, 70 and 95.
- ⁹⁸ MG, 98/89, my tr.
- ⁹⁹ MG, 97/89, my tr.
- ¹⁰⁰ MG, 97–8/88–9, my tr.
- ¹⁰¹ MG, 98, 99 and 100/90–1, my tr.
- ¹⁰² MG, 145/134, my tr.
- ¹⁰³ MG, 146/134, my tr.
- ¹⁰⁴ MG, 146/135, tr. mod.
- ¹⁰⁵ MG, 147/135, my tr.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁷ MG, 149/137, tr. mod.
- ¹⁰⁸ MG, 150/138.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁰ MG, 219/200.
- ¹¹¹ HPS, 202–3.
- ¹¹² MG, 277/255–6.
- ¹¹³ HPS, 203.
- ¹¹⁴ MG, 173/43, my tr.
- ¹¹⁵ MG, 352/323, tr. mod.
- ¹¹⁶ MG, 353/324, tr. mod.

Chapter 6

- ¹ Cited in Kolloen, 2004, p. 150.
- ² Derrida, 1995, p. 184.
- ³ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, 1990, p. 295.
- ⁴ Snyder, 1998, p. 213.
- ⁵ Kolloen, 2004, p. 170.
- ⁶ Østby, 1972, p. 13, 18 and 33.
- ⁷ Löwenthal, 1980, p. 104.
- ⁸ Löwenthal, 1987, p. 125.
- ⁹ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, 1990, p. 303, their emphasis.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, 312.
- ¹¹ Ibid, 304.
- ¹² Rosenberg, 1982, p. 268.
- ¹³ Ibid, 269.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, 268–9.
- ¹⁵ Kittang, 1984, p. 307.
- ¹⁶ Kittang, 1995, pp. 265–6.
- ¹⁷ Derrida, 1995, p. 184. Derrida, incidentally, discusses the Hamsun-reference in Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics* in the context of painting. See Derrida, 1987b, pp. 377–9.
- ¹⁸ Derrida, 1995, pp. 182–3.
- ¹⁹ Heidegger, 2000, p. 213.

- ²⁰ Ibid, 40.
- ²¹ Ibid, 30–1.
- ²² Ibid, 28 and 30.
- ²³ Ibid, p. 29. The brackets are Heidegger's interpolations. His translators have translated the German translation of Hamsun into English, and the result is uncannily accurate. See Chapter XXXIII, SV 12, 294.
- ²⁴ Ibid, 28 and 29.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 30.
- ²⁶ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, 1990, p. 312.
- ²⁷ Lyngstad, 2005, p. 271.
- ²⁸ For a chronology, see Snyder, 1998.
- ²⁹ Snyder, 1998, pp. 31–3.
- ³⁰ Johan Fredrik Paasche, *Aftenposten*, 7 July 1934. Cited in HPS, 233.
- ³¹ HPS, 233, Hamsun's emphasis.
- ³² HPS, 234.
- ³³ Kolloen, 2004, p. 457.
- ³⁴ PGS, 65/79, my tr.
- ³⁵ Brevig and de Figueiredo, 2002, p. 10.
- ³⁶ Dahl, 1999, p. 58.
- ³⁷ HPS, 232.
- ³⁸ HPS, 233.
- ³⁹ HPS, 232.
- ⁴⁰ Brevig and de Figueiredo, 2002, p. 9.
- ⁴¹ Reproduced in *ibid*, pp. 209–11.
- ⁴² See Dahl et al., 1982, p. 46.
- ⁴³ HPS, 231.
- ⁴⁴ HPS, 336.
- ⁴⁵ Quisling cited in Dahl, 1999, pp. 71–2.
- ⁴⁶ Quisling in Brevig and de Figueiredo, 2002, p. 213.
- ⁴⁷ Brevig and de Figueiredo, 2002, p. 28.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 41.
- ⁴⁹ Dahl, 1999, pp. 102–3.
- ⁵⁰ Witoszek, 1998, p. 136.
- ⁵¹ HPS, 236.
- ⁵² HPS, 235.
- ⁵³ Kolloen, 2004, pp. 147–50.
- ⁵⁴ Mann, 1975, p. 203.
- ⁵⁵ HPS, 240.
- ⁵⁶ Dahl, 1999, p. 188.
- ⁵⁷ HPS, 241/SL 2, 218, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁸ Dahl, 1999, p. 174.
- ⁵⁹ SL 2, 219.
- ⁶⁰ Kolloen, 2004, pp. 225–6.
- ⁶¹ Ibid, 230.
- ⁶² HPS, 240.
- ⁶³ Berglyd, 2008; Kolloen, 2004, pp. 209–10; and Ferguson, 1987, p. 350.
- ⁶⁴ HPS, 240.
- ⁶⁵ Dahl, 1999, p. 73.

- ⁶⁶ Dahl, 1999, p. 221.
- ⁶⁷ HPS, 239–40.
- ⁶⁸ HPS, 240.
- ⁶⁹ Ibsen, 2006, p. 926.
- ⁷⁰ HPS, 240.
- ⁷¹ Dahl, 1999, pp. 206–12.
- ⁷² HPS, 246, Hamsun's emphasis.
- ⁷³ Nøkleby, 2008, p. 154.
- ⁷⁴ HPS, 248.
- ⁷⁵ HPS, 251.
- ⁷⁶ HPS, 252.
- ⁷⁷ HPS, 252.
- ⁷⁸ HPS, 253.
- ⁷⁹ Hamsun, 1990, p. 236.
- ⁸⁰ Terboven cited in Nøkleby, 2008, p. 147.
- ⁸¹ HPS, 268–9.
- ⁸² Kolloen, 2004, pp. 288–9.
- ⁸³ Ibid, pp. 260–1; Nøkleby, 2008, p. 234.
- ⁸⁴ Nilson, 1960, p. 148.
- ⁸⁵ Hoel cited in Nilson, 1960, p. 151.
- ⁸⁶ HPS, 262.
- ⁸⁷ Nilson, 1960, p. 149.
- ⁸⁸ HPS, 263.
- ⁸⁹ HPS, 262.
- ⁹⁰ Terboven cited in Nøkleby, 2008, p. 149.
- ⁹¹ HPS, 263.
- ⁹² Hansen, 1978, p. 108.
- ⁹³ Nøkleby, 2008, pp. 147–9.
- ⁹⁴ HPS, 274.
- ⁹⁵ Hamsun, 1996, p. 316.
- ⁹⁶ Hitler cited in Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, 1990, p. 311.
- ⁹⁷ Derrida, 1988, p. 647.

Chapter 7

- ¹ M, 439/236, my tr.
- ² Derrida, 2000, p. 43.
- ³ PGS, 5/5, tr. mod.
- ⁴ PGS, 185/231, tr. mod.
- ⁵ Stray, 1979, pp. 100–1.
- ⁶ Langfeldt and Ødegård, 1978, p. 101 and Stuberg, 1995, pp. 26–7.
- ⁷ Ferguson, 1987, p. 402 and Stuberg, 1995, p. 28.
- ⁸ Stray, 1979, p. 123.
- ⁹ Quoted in Stray, 1979, p. 193.
- ¹⁰ Gimnes, 1998, pp. 213–14.
- ¹¹ PGS, 148/184.

- ¹² PGS, 151/187, tr. mod.
- ¹³ PGS, 150/186, tr. mod.
- ¹⁴ PGS, 148/184, tr. mod.
- ¹⁵ PGS, 151/187, tr. mod.
- ¹⁶ PGS, 149/185, tr. mod.
- ¹⁷ PGS, 150/186, my tr.
- ¹⁸ PGS, 151/187, tr. mod.
- ¹⁹ PGS, 151–2/187–9, emphases added; tr. mod.
- ²⁰ PGS, 153/190, my tr.
- ²¹ PGS, 153/190, tr. mod.
- ²² Stuberg, 1995, pp. 40–4.
- ²³ Oskar Hasselknippe, 'En gigant raver gjennom skogen', *Verdens Gang*, 17 December 1947. Cited in Stuberg, 1995, pp. 40–1.
- ²⁴ Philip Houm, 'Underlig nittiåring', *Dagbladet*, 29 September 1949. Cited in Stuberg, 1995, p. 64.
- ²⁵ Haakon Odd Christiansen, 'Paa gjengrodde stier', *Nidaros*, 22 October 1949. Cited in Stuberg, 1995, p. 66.
- ²⁶ Adorno quoted in Felman and Laub, 1992, p. 34.
- ²⁷ Editorial, *Verdens Gang*, 4th August 1955. Cited in Langfeldt, 1958, p. 415.
- ²⁸ Hermundstad, 1999, pp. 192–245.
- ²⁹ Nilson, 1960, p. 16 and Giersing et al., 1975, p. 20.
- ³⁰ Stuberg, 1995, p. 119.
- ³¹ Hansen, 1978.
- ³² See Sjønberg, 1979 and Stecher-Hansen, 1997.
- ³³ See Andenæs, 1979 and Hagerberg, 1979.
- ³⁴ Dingstad, 2003, p. 258.
- ³⁵ Ibid, 264.
- ³⁶ PGS, 62/75.
- ³⁷ Zagar, 1999, p. 255.
- ³⁸ Kolloen, 2004, pp. 385–6.
- ³⁹ Derrida, 2000, p. 43
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, 30.
- ⁴¹ Ibid, 43.
- ⁴² Ibid, 29.
- ⁴³ PGS, 99/121, my tr.
- ⁴⁴ Gimnes, 1998, pp. 209–10 and 219.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 312–3.
- ⁴⁶ PGS, 72/88, my tr.
- ⁴⁷ Gimnes, 1998, p. 225.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, 253.
- ⁴⁹ PGS, 74/90, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁰ PGS, 75/91.
- ⁵¹ PGS, 75/91.
- ⁵² PGS, 34/41.
- ⁵³ PGS, 35/42.
- ⁵⁴ PGS, 59/71, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁵ PGS, 71/87, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁶ PGS, 157/195.

- ⁵⁷ PGS, 165/205, my tr. The American digression recalls a series of earlier short stories set in and around the sites of Hamsun's migration years in America during the 1880s. See *Kratskog* (1903) and *Stridende Liv* (1905) in the Bibliography subsection 'A Chronology of Hamsun's Books and their English Translations'.
- ⁵⁸ PGS, 165/205, tr. mod.
- ⁵⁹ PGS, 166/206, tr. mod.
- ⁶⁰ PGS, 166/206, my tr.
- ⁶¹ PGS, 172/214, my tr.
- ⁶² PGS, 184-5/230-1, tr. mod.
- ⁶³ PGS, 69/89, my tr.
- ⁶⁴ Gimnes, 1998, p. 220.
- ⁶⁵ PGS, 147/182, my tr.
- ⁶⁶ PGS, 147-8/183, my tr.
- ⁶⁷ Kafka, 1999, p. 91.
- ⁶⁸ IÆ, 164/24 .
- ⁶⁹ MG, 143/3.
- ⁷⁰ UHS, 307/3, tr. mod.
- ⁷¹ De Man, 1979, p. 10.

Bibliography

Note: The Abbreviations page at the beginning of this book gives full details of the specific works from Hamsun's oeuvre that are referred to in this study. The new 27-volume *Collected Works* (NHS, 2007–2009), under the editorship of Lars Frode Larsen, collects for the first time the sprawling diversity of Hamsun's oeuvre in a reliable Norwegian edition, with clear editorial notes, detailing the provenance and publication history of each text. English-speaking readers, meanwhile, may consult other sources for overview and context (e.g. Næss, 1984; Ferguson, 1987; Lyngstad, 2005 and the *Selected Letters*, SL 1–2). The chronology below is limited to the 'books' Hamsun published in his lifetime, displaying (i) the initial year of publication; (ii) the original title; (iii) a simple generic marker; and (iv) bibliographic details of any existing translations. This is not intended as a reflection of the scope and itinerary of *Troubling Legacies*, but as an accessible overview of Hamsun's books for English-speaking readers.

A Chronology of Hamsun's Books and their English Translations

- 1877 *Den Gaadefulde* ['The Enigmatic One', Juvenilia]: untranslated.
- 1878 *Bjørger* [Juvenilia]: untranslated.
- 1888 *Fra det Moderne Amerikas Aandsliv* [Polemic]: *The Cultural Life of Modern America*. Tr. and Ed. Barbara Gordon Morgridge. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969.
- 1890 *Sult* ['not a Novel']: *Hunger*. Tr. George Egerton. New York: Knopf, 1920 (first pub. London: Smithers, 1899); *Hunger*. Tr. Robert Bly. London: Picador, 1974 (first pub. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967); *Hunger*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 2001 (first pub. Edinburgh: Cannongate, 1996).
- 1892 *Mysterier* [Novel]: *Mysteries*. Tr. Arthur G. Chater. New York: Knopf, 1927; *Mysteries*. Tr. Gerry Bothmer. London: Picador, 1971 (first pub. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971); *Mysteries*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 2001.
- 1893 *Redaktør Lynge* ['Editor Lynge', Novel]: untranslated.
- 1893 *Nyjord* [Novel]: *Shallow Soil*. Tr. Carl Christian Hyllestad. London: Duckworth, 1914.
- 1894 *Pan. Af Løjtnant Thomas Glahns Papirer* [Novel]: *Pan*. Tr. W. W. Worster. London: Gyldendal, 1920; *Pan: From Lieutenant Thomas Glahn's Papers*. Tr. James McFarlane. London: Artemis, 1955; *Pan: From Lieutenant Thomas Glahn's Papers*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 1998.

- 1895 *Ved Rigets Port* ['At the Gates of the Kingdom', Play]: untranslated.
- 1896 *Livets Spil* ['The Game of Life', Play]: untranslated.
- 1897 *Siesta* [Short Stories]: For a selection, see *Tales of Love and Loss*. Tr. Robert Ferguson. London: Souvenir Press, 1997.
- 1898 *Aftenrøde* ['Evening Red', Play]: untranslated.
- 1898 *Victoria. En Kærligheds Historie* [Novel]: *Victoria: A Love Story*. Tr. Arthur G. Chater. New York: Knopf, 1923; *Victoria*. Tr. Oliver Stallybrass. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969; *Victoria*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 2005.
- 1902 *Munken Vendt* ['Friar Vendt', Play]: untranslated.
- 1903 *I Æventyrland* [Travelogue]: *In Wonderland*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. Minnesota: Ig, 2004.
- 1903 *Dronning Tamara* ['Queen Tamara', Play]: untranslated.
- 1903 *Kratskog* ['Brushwood', Short Stories]: For a selection, see *Tales of Love and Loss*. Tr. Robert Ferguson. London: Souvenir Press, 1997; and *Knut Hamsun Remembers America: Essays and Stories 1885–1949*. Tr. Richard Nelson Current. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2003.
- 1904 *Det vilde Kor* ['The Wild Choir', Poems]: untranslated.
- 1904 *Sværmere* [Novel]: *Dreamers*. Tr. W. W. Worster. New York: Knopf, 1921 (also published as *Mothwise*. London: Gyldendal, 1922); *Dreamers*. Tr. Tom Geddes. New York: New Directions, 1996.
- 1905 *Stridende Liv. Skildringer fra Vesten og Østen* ['Struggling Life: Writings from the West and the East', Stories and Travelogues]: Partially translated in *Tales of Love and Loss*. Tr. Robert Ferguson. London: Souvenir Press, 1997; and *Knut Hamsun Remembers America: Essays and Stories 1885–1949*. Tr. Richard Nelson Current. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2003.
- 1906 *Under Høststjernen*. [Novel]: *Wanderer: Under the Autumn Star and On Muted Strings*. Tr. Oliver and Gunnvor Stallybrass. London: Picador, 1977.
- 1908 *Benoni* [Novel]: *Benoni*. Tr. Arthur G. Chater. New York: Knopf, 1925.
- 1908 *Rosa. Af Student Pærlus' Papirer* [Novel]: *Rosa*. Tr. Arthur G. Chater. New York: Knopf, 1926; *Rosa*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. Copenhagen and New York: Green Integer, 2009 (first. pub. Sun and Moon Books, 1998).
- 1909 *En Vandrør spiller med Sordin* [Novel]: *Wanderer: Under the Autumn Star and On Muted Strings*. Tr. Oliver and Gunnvor Stallybrass. London: Picador, 1977.
- 1910 *Livet ivold* [Play]: *In the Grip of Life*. Tr. Graham and Tristan Rawson. New York: Knopf, 1924.
- 1912 *Den sidste Glæde* [Novel]: *Look Back on Happiness*. Tr. Paula Wiking. New York: Coward-McCann, 1940; *The Last Joy*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2003.
- 1913 *Børn av Tiden* [Novel]: *Children of the Age*. Tr. J. S. Scott. New York: Knopf, 1924.
- 1915 *Segelfoss By* [Novel]: *Segelfoss Town*. Tr. J. S. Scott. New York: Knopf, 1925.
- 1917 *Markens Grøde* [Novel]: *Growth of the Soil*. Tr. W. W. Worster. London: Souvenir Press, 1995 (first pub. London: Gyldendal, 1920); *Growth of the Soil*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad. New York: Penguin, 2007.
- 1920 *Konerne ved Vandposten* [Novel]: *The Women at the Pump*. Tr. Arthur G. Chater. New York: Knopf, 1929; *The Women at the Pump*. Tr. Oliver and Gunnvor Stallybrass. London: Souvenir Press, 1978.

- 1923 *Siste kapitel* [Novel]: *Chapter the Last*. Tr. Arthur G. Chater. New York: Knopf, 1929.
- 1927 *Landstrykere* [Novel]: *Vagabonds*. Tr. Eugene Gay-Tiffit. New York: Coward-McCann, 1930; *Wayfarers*. Tr. James McFarlane. London: Souvenir Press, 1980.
- 1930 *August* [Novel]: *August*. Tr. Eugene Gay-Tiffit. New York: Coward-McCann, 1931.
- 1933 *Men Livet lever* ['Yet Life Lives', Novel]: *The Road Leads On*. Tr. Eugene Gay-Tiffit. New York: Coward-McCann, 1934.
- 1936 *Ringen sluttet* [Novel]: *The Ring is Closed*. Tr. Eugene Gay-Tiffit. New York: Coward-McCann, 1937.
- 1949 *Paa gjengrodde Stier* ['not Autobiography']: *On Overgrown Paths*. Tr. Carl L. Anderson. London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968; *On Overgrown Paths*. Tr. Sverre Lyngstad, Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1999.

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